



# ANTI-LIBERAL ATTITUDES

TBILISI,  
ADJARA,  
SAMEGRELO

**ANTI-LIBERAL ATTITUDES:  
TBILISI,  
ADJARA,  
SAMEGRELO**



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**ANTI-LIBERAL ATTITUDES**

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# INTRODUCTION

This paper is a report on the study of public attitudes in three regions of Georgia. The first, Adjara Autonomous Republic, is an official region, the second, Samegrelo (or Megrelia), is a historical province and a part of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region. The third is the capital city Tbilisi (also referred to as a “region” in the study). The research examines the influence that populist and/or radical elements have on the public from a political point of view, within the context of a conservative-liberal dichotomy. This study is built on the previous research<sup>1</sup> conducted in two other regions, Shida Kartli and Kakheti in 2018-2019, and allows a broader perspective of the country and the dangers posed by anti-liberal populism<sup>2</sup> and radicalization. The study measures and evaluates such threats from two perspectives - domestic and external. From a domestic standpoint two processes are salient – the potential reversal of democratic reformatory processes and the possible reinforcement of radical forces, including anti-secular ones. External pressures include the type of anti-liberal populism used to promote Russian propaganda and the Kremlin’s political agenda in Georgia.

Quantitative data was collected and analyzed in 2019-2020 by the Liberal Academy Tbilisi (EI-LAT) in close collaboration with the Institute for Social Research and Analysis (ISSA-Georgia). These worked closely while processing and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data (for example from focus groups). This paper is intended for all stakeholders, including the wider public, the media and non-governmental and international organizations.

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The decision to choose a geographically regional approach covering Samegrelo, Adjara and Tbilisi was based on the fact that it allows to better understand developments in the regional contexts and, at the same time, increases the horizons of data generalization. Our findings showed significant, and in some cases even radical, differences between regions concerning popular perceptions of events or occurrences in some aspects.

Unlike the previous part of this research on which this study is based, we focus more on **religious issues** in this study. A particular criterion that was

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1 Liberal Academy Tbilisi, The Danger of Anti-Liberal Populism and Russian influence in the Regions of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2019. Please follow: <https://bit.ly/3eRym2U>

2 While populism by definition is opposite to liberalism, we use the term “anti-liberal populism” to emphasize the strong anti-liberal character on this phenomenon. By “Liberal” we mean a wide range of political and social forces that adhere to the principles of human rights, the rule of law, democracy and European integration.

identified as a separate object of study was the influence on individual respondents' views of the existence of a personal "spiritual counsellor", either priest or imam. This revealed interesting trends not only in matters directly or indirectly related to faith, but also in seemingly distant subjects such as foreign policy priorities or trust towards political institutions.

Based on statistically reliable data, we suggest that religion occupies a place of utmost importance in the lives of most people in the regions studied. This factor has a bearing not only on actively religious people (who have a religious leader and / or are regularly practicing religious rituals), but also on those who are apparently distant from religious institutions. The importance of religion for those studied, according to statistics, was related to trust towards the Georgian Orthodox Church in 2019 in all three regions (Tbilisi, Samegrelo, and Adjara). It was significantly lower in these regions than in Shida Kartli and Kakheti, where the survey was conducted a year earlier. The trust of the residents of Tbilisi, Samegrelo and Adjara towards the Georgian Orthodox Church was 75.2% overall, while according to the findings of the 2018 survey in Kakheti and Shida Kartli the figure was 85%.<sup>3</sup>

Findings in Adjara included a different picture, not only from a regional perspective (i.e. in relation to other regions), but also between the two main religious groups in this region. Christians and Muslims have significantly different views on many topics. Some dissimilarities were so noticeable that we created a separate section on Adjara offering more insights into attitudes and viewpoints in the Autonomous Republic. Simultaneously, Adjara is distinguished by its widely diverse attitudes towards foreign policy. Its Christian population is more well-disposed towards Russia, while the trust towards public institutions was, by far, higher among the Muslim Georgian population of the republic. Muslims demonstrated a higher rate of trust towards the Parliament, the President and the Prime Minister, contrasting with Adjaran Christians, or with the populations of Samegrelo and Tbilisi. For example, while 54% of Muslim Georgians said they trust the President, these attitudes were shared by only 30.2% of the Adjaran Christians, 21.1% of Samegrelo respondents and 14.6% of Tbilisi respondents.

One of the most important segments of the study was **trust towards institutions**. Anti-establishment attitudes are an integral aspect of populism, which is the key object of our study. In addition to public institutions like the President, the Government, the Parliament and the Courts, we measured trust towards the Church and the Army<sup>4</sup>. However, we also studied **attitudes towards radical groups and the non-governmental sector** in the three regions, which

3 The total of the answers "completely trust " and "trust somewhat".

4 Accordingly, trust by the Muslim population of Adjara towards the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia was measured.

yielded interesting results. To avoid confusion, we chose the following wording for our questions: “How much do you trust, or distrust organizations like the Young Lawyers’ Association (a long-standing liberal NGO)?” And “How much do you trust or distrust organizations like the far-right group, Georgian March?” Also, we measured trust towards the **Georgian Media** with the question “How much do you trust or distrust Georgian journalists?”

We paid special attention to **foreign policy issues** and public trust towards different countries and international organizations and associations, including perceptions of global economic and military strength powers. The worsening of the situation worldwide, developments in Middle East and the rise of populist forces in Western countries prompted us to ask “During grave crises (full-scale warfare, natural disaster, etc.) that can threaten the very existence of Georgia, which country / international union can we rely on?”

Although foreign policy priorities have been the focus of quite a lot of studies, we concentrate on Georgia’s regional, internal perspectives. In addition, we explored the foreign priorities by counterposing them with several other important dimensions, which equipped us with fuller opportunities to make future analyses by not only identifying existing problems, but also providing useful leads to examine them further. In particular, we aimed to show the relationship between open or latent pro-Russian attitudes and characteristics such as age, gender, economic status, level of education and religiosity (for example, having / not having a personal “religious counsellor”).

In a separate section we discuss **fears and phobias** measured within the target audiences along with their attitudes towards different ethnic or religious groups. Studying phobias is essential since it is a major component of the radical anti-liberal groups’ rhetoric and it is also actively used by the Russian political leadership for subversive activities to promote their interests in other countries.<sup>5</sup>

One important section covers the **value-oriented statistically calculated indices** which provide interesting insight into the political orientation of the populations in the three regions of Georgia based on gender, age, level of education and other criteria, towards four value-based directions: liberal/anti-liberal, modernist/traditionalist, pro-Western/pro-Russian and populist/anti-populist.

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<sup>5</sup> This was indirectly confirmed by the Russian official narrative, when a government-funded think tank in their report to the Russian government in March 2018 unequivocally advised the Kremlin to stop supporting the ultra-right political forces in other countries. See article in the *Vedomosti* newspaper under the headline “Russia should not support the ultra-right in Europe”, March 11, 2018: <https://bit.ly/30juunA> (accessed June 7, 2020).

This report consists of two parts. The first is more general and contains the findings of a representative survey and focus groups in three regions - Tbilisi, Samegrelo and Adjara. The second part focuses specifically on Adjara, due to the fact that research in this region revealed significant differences between the attitudes of the Christian and Muslim populations. Each of these two parts includes sections that highlight regional attitudes towards socio-demographic variables; perception and acceptance of identity, other ethnicities/nations and social groups; trust towards state and non-state institutions; perceived threats from the state; democracy and authoritarianism; political participation; and, the role of religion in politics and foreign priorities. At the end of Part I, value-oriented indices are proposed, based on data processed according to the following scales: Modernist vs. Traditionalist; Pro-Western vs. Anti-Western; Liberal vs. Anti-Liberal; and, Populist vs. Anti-populist.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Populism and anti-liberalism

- The predominance of **nativist and anti-immigrant** sentiment, the strong acceptance of ultra-conservative narratives, low trust towards state institutions and political elites, and stronger perception of threats **in all three regions** create a favorable environment for populist forces.
- **Anti-liberal** viewpoints are expressed more often by men than by women.
- **Nativist and anti-immigrant** attitudes are prevalent in all three regions. The majority of respondents were against granting citizenship to foreigners or selling land to them. This attitude applies to all groups of “foreigners” (Turks, Russians, “Europeans”, etc.).
- There is a demand for an **authoritarian leader** in all three regions. Paternalistic attitudes prevail in Samegrelo and Adjara, while individualistic attitudes are stronger in Tbilisi.
- **Patriarchal sentiments** are more evident in Samegrelo when it comes to dividing property, who should inherit property (son or daughter). Adjara and Tbilisi are more inclined towards equality.

## Perceived threats /attitudes towards “others”

- About a third of respondents in all three regions think that **Georgian traditions** are jeopardized by the United States, while about a quarter of those surveyed expect this threat to come from the European Union. In Samegrelo there are more people who think that USA is a bigger threat against Georgian traditions than Russia. Most respondents in Samegrelo and Adjara think that Turkey represents a threat against Georgian traditions. About a third of the population of Adjara and Tbilisi perceive Russia as a threat, while only 19% in Samegrelo think likewise.
- According to those interviewed in all three regions, **democracy, human rights, and Georgian traditions** are currently endangered in Georgia. This perception was highest in Tbilisi.
- Samegrelo is especially notable for its intolerance of the religious rights of **Muslim Georgians** while Adjara and Tbilisi are most tolerant of these rights.
- In Samegrelo respondents expressed less acceptance of **Abkhazians** and only about half of the them believe that most Abkhazians are good people.

- In all three regions, people are uncertain that most **Turks, Russians and Chinese** want good for Georgia.
- Georgians are thought to be **the best Orthodox Christians** in all three regions (compared to the other Orthodox nations like Greeks and Russians). The vast majority admits that Orthodox Christians need to respect other religions.
- In all three regions, the top three **least wanted neighbors** are the same: drug addicts, homosexuals, criminals. However, in Tbilisi and Adjara the most unwanted neighbor would be a “criminal”; in Samegrelo this category is “homosexual”.
- Most respondents would accept for their **child to marry** a German, Ukrainian or Russian, but not a Turk or Chinese. Respondents’ opinions on marrying an Abkhazian, an Ossetian or a Muslim Georgian were divided. The most judgmental was Samegrelo, where 74% of respondents wouldn’t agree for their child to marry a Muslim Georgian (almost four times more than in Adjara). The main obstacle in this regard was the religion.
- The vast majority in all three regions welcome **foreign tourists** visiting Georgia.
- There was no broad consensus about how or when an **individual can be considered Georgian**. Although two main categories were identified: A person must either self-identify as Georgian, or else have at least one Georgian parent. However, neither of these opinions was supported by more than a third of respondents.

## Trust towards institutions

- In all three regions, the church, the army, liberal NGOs and the media are trusted more than the authorities. In general, the trust towards state bodies - Courts, the Parliament and the President - is low across the board. Parliament is rated the lowest in all three regions - 65.7% of respondents distrust this institution (37.1% completely distrust and 28.6% somewhat distrust).
- The most critical of authorities are the residents of Tbilisi and the most trusting are the Adjarians.
- Distrust towards the **Prime Minister** is highest in Tbilisi. In all three regions, however, he is more trusted than the President.
- **Tbilisi** respondents were more interested in current political developments compared to the other regions.
- **Anti-secular** sentiment is relatively strong in all three regions. In **Tbilisi** and **Samegrelo**, 40% of respondents think that the government should take into account the stance of the church during political decision making. This percentage is especially high among the respondents who have a **priest**. For example, in Samegrelo, 49.6% of

respondents with a priest and 37.6% of those without think so.

- A significant number of Orthodox Christians in all three regions who trust the Church distrust any political institution (President, Prime Minister, and Parliament). The ratio of such Orthodox Christian believers in Tbilisi was more than a half - 50.6%, in Samegrelo - 38.3%, and 29.6% in Adjara.

## Foreign priorities

- The level of education is directly related to pro-Westernism and inversely proportional to pro-Russianism. A high level of education strengthens pro-Westernism, while a low one weakens it.
- Both in Tbilisi and Samegrelo a high economic status closely corresponds to pro-Western sentiments, while there is low correspondence for those with low economic situations.
- In Tbilisi, irreligion corresponds more to a pro-Western orientation, while in Samegrelo, religiosity induces a pro-Russian orientation. This latter tendency is not observed in Adjara. However, our data reveal that in the three regions overall, Orthodox parishioners (who have a priest) are more isolationists.
- In Tbilisi and Samegrelo people think that the EU is the most realistic market for Georgian goods, while in Adjara the Russian market is seen as more realistic.
- Pro-Western sentiment in Adjara is stronger among Muslim Georgians while Christian Georgians are more pro-Russian.
- Only half (50.8%) of Tbilisi respondents believe that the guarantee of Georgia's security is assured exclusively by joining NATO. In Adjara this figure is 54.6%, while it is the highest in Samegrelo - 69.4%.
- Georgia's accession to the **Eurasian Union** has the most supporters in Adjara, where this figure reaches 29.3%.
- Some of the respondents in all three regions are in favor of joining the **European Union** and the **Eurasian Union at the same time**. In Tbilisi 14.2% of respondents support this, 7.2% in Samegrelo, and 24.8% in Adjara.
- **In terms of military power**, the **USA** is considered strongest in all three regions, followed by Russia. In Adjara, the USA and Russian military are thought to be more or less equal, with some priority given to the former. However, Christians in Adjara give some precedence to Russia.
- Russia is considered to be Georgia's **main enemy** in all three regions. In Tbilisi and Samegrelo people think that USA is their **best friend**, while in Adjara it is Ukraine. However, for Adjaran Christians, Russia is the second after Ukraine among friends and the USA is given third place. For Muslim Georgians, the top three friends are Ukraine, USA and Turkey.

- Most respondents share the opinion that USA is the **most economically powerful** country.
- **During an existential crisis**, the largest proportion of our respondents would rely on the EU, with the United States and NATO slightly behind. More than a tenth would rely on the UN and Germany, while an insignificant number would count on Russia.
- Attitudes towards being educated abroad show that Tbilisi residents give their preference to **Germany**, while in Adjara and Samegrelo the choice is the **USA**.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in this study. We used face-to-face interviews as a quantitative research tool. The 2014 census was used as the sampling model, with 600 respondents interviewed in each region. A total of 1,800 respondents were interviewed. The data are statistically representative, with a sampling error from 2.7% to 3.8% according to region. Field work for interviewing was conducted from November 24 to December 5, 2019. Interviews generally lasted from 25-27 minute and were conducted in Georgian.

Quality control was carried out after the completion of the field work by checking 10% of the total number of questionnaires, i.e. 180 interviews. Data collection was performed using **ODK collect** (the application was installed on all interviewers' tablets). Data were processed by the Institute for Social Research and Analysis with the SPSS software (version 20.0). Univariate and bivariate analysis methods were used in processing and analysis.

Qualitative research for primary data collection used **focus groups** conducted remotely through the online Zoom platform in May 2020 (due to limitations related to the Covid-19 pandemic). A total of ten focus groups were held, with eight people in each. Four groups were held in Tbilisi, four in Adjara and two in Samegrelo. The categorization was based on age, gender and the criterion of having or not having a religious leader (priest or imam) (Table 1):

**Table 1:**

Region	Number of focus groups participants	Selection
Tbilisi	32	Men (25-) - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader Men (45+) - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader Women (25-) - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader Women (45+) - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader
Adjara	32	Muslim (men) – 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader Christian (men) - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader Christian (women) - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader Men (25-) - 4 Muslim / 4 Christian
Samegrelo	16	Men - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader Women - 4 who have a religious leader/4 who don't have a religious leader

# **PART I: ANTI-LIBERAL ATTITUDES IN TBILISI, ADJARA AND SAMEGRELO**

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The first part of the study is dedicated to the socio-demographic variables of the population in three regions of Georgia - Tbilisi, Adjara and Samegrelo in relation to their anti-liberal attitudes. The research included a representative quantitative survey as well as focus groups in all three regions. Examining socio-demographic variables, in addition to providing valuable information about the specific character of the population of these regions, is also important for finding correlations between individual's viewpoints and variables such as their education level, economic and marital status, language skills, etc. As a result of the data analysis, certain socio-demographic variables offered statistically reliable correlations, while others did not. All of the statistics below are direct results of our research.

# CHAPTER 1.

## Socio-Demographic Variables

The absolute majority of the populations surveyed in the three target regions were ethnic Georgian - (Samegrelo 99.5%; Adjara 96.5%; Tbilisi 90.5%). The ratio of the native population<sup>6</sup> in Tbilisi was 58.3%, in Adjara and Samegrelo this figure is more than a half (Adjara 50.8%; Samegrelo - 51.9%). The majority of those surveyed in Tbilisi, 59.5%, had higher education. This figure is significantly higher among native Tbilisians (64.4%) compared to non-natives (52.2%). The rate of those studied with a higher education is 39.5% in Adjara, and 26.3% in Samegrelo.

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The populations surveyed in all three regions rated their level of knowledge of the Russian language higher than for English. 83.6% of the population in Tbilisi, 75.5% in Samegrelo and 69.6% in Adjara rate their level of knowledge of Russian as average or high. Almost half of the respondents in Tbilisi (48.5%) say that they speak English well or average, while this figure is 28% in Adjara and 22.4% in Samegrelo.<sup>7</sup>

The vast majority, or 98% of the population surveyed in Samegrelo, profess that they are Orthodox Christians. The same is true for the majority of those in Tbilisi (86.8%). In Adjara 56.8% are Orthodox Christians and 35.8% are Muslims. In Tbilisi 38.2% of respondents attend religious services at least once a month, as do 28.2% in Samegrelo. Similar trends are observed regarding the observance of religious fasting, with 62% of respondents in Samegrelo, 46% in Tbilisi and 35.5%<sup>8</sup> in Adjara who said that they never fast. In Tbilisi 22.5% of the people surveyed say they have read the whole Bible (Old and New Testaments), twice as many as in Samegrelo (11.9%) and in Adjara (for those who identify themselves as Orthodox Christians (10.3%)). In Adjara 9.0% of Muslims interviewed have read the entire Qur'an.

6 In this study, "native" refers to people born in the communities where they currently live.

7 The analysis of foreign policy priorities from the standpoint of language skills gave us contradictory data, therefore this component has not been included in the study and is given here only as a statistical reference.

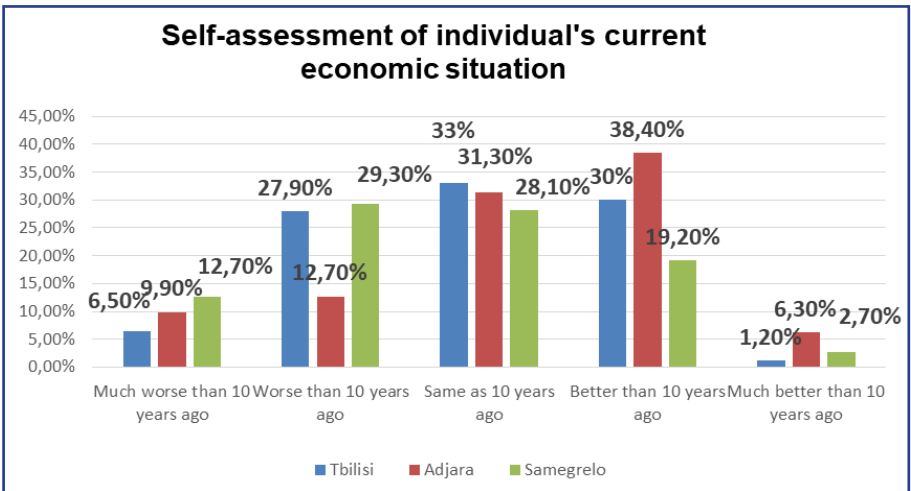
8 Data for Adjara is given in more detail in Part II.

The question of having a priest or an imam referred to religious leadership for a believer's personal life. To the question of whether or not the interviewee had an Orthodox priest was answered in the affirmative by 34.6% of the respondents in Tbilisi, while in Samegrelo the rate was 22.3%, and in Adjara 19.8%. However, majority of respondents in the Muslim community of Adjara (51.9%) have an imam.

The majority of the population surveyed in Tbilisi (54.4%) and about a half surveyed in Adjara and Samegrelo (50.7% and 49.7%, respectively) have close relatives who currently live abroad. In Tbilisi, the top countries concerned were Italy (16.4%), USA (15.5%), Russia (13.3%) and Greece (10.51%). In Adjara and Samegrelo, Russia (34.5% and 19.8%, respectively) and Turkey (12.4% and 13.4% respectively) are the top first and second countries where relatives currently resided.

Of all three regions, Samegrelo's respondents assessed their families' economic situation as the most adverse: every fourth respondent from this region said the economic situation of their family was "somewhat bad" or "very bad". Samegrelo appears the most vulnerable in other ways as well. Most respondents (42.1%) said the economic situation of their own family had worsened compared to ten years before. However, the same question to those in Adjara elicited a very different picture. Answers were highly positive, as 44.7% said that the economic situation of their family had improved compared to ten years before, and only 22.6% said that it worsened. However, the current economic situation for most families in all three regions was perceived as "average" (Tbilisi - 69.4%, Adjara - 76.6%, Samegrelo - 65.2%) (**Figure 1**).

**Figure 1.**



About a third of the population of Tbilisi and Adjara consider themselves employed (excluding self-employment). In Tbilisi this figure is 36.1% (there is a big difference between native and non-native Tbilisians - respectively, 42% and 27.7 % of them are full-or part-time employed), 32.4% in Adjara and 18% in Samegrelo. Compared to other regions, the ratio of self-employed is higher in Samegrelo - 16.8%; the rates of self-employed in Tbilisi and Adjara are 11.1% and 10.2%, respectively. The vast majority of those in Adjara and Samegrelo have no savings (Adjara 83.8%, Samegrelo 88.8%), while in Tbilisi this figure is 73.7%. Most in Tbilisi and Adjara have not borrowed money for food recently (Tbilisi 72.6%, Adjara 60.6%). In Samegrelo, however, the picture is different: 48.9% answer that they have borrowed money for food at least once in the last 6 months.

Social networks are used daily by the majority of the population surveyed in Tbilisi and Adjara (59.4% and 57.3%, respectively), while in Samegrelo by slightly less than a half (47.5%). In Tbilisi 19.5% respondents never use social networks; the percentages are 26% in Adjara and 30.9% in Samegrelo. In all three regions, Facebook is the most popular social network (used by 49.7% of respondents overall).

Most respondents in Tbilisi, 54.8%, said that they would leave Georgia for some time if they had the opportunity. Slightly less answered the same in Adjara and Samegrelo (46.6% and 41.3%, respectively). However, when asked, "Would you leave the country forever?" the vast majority in all three regions answered that they would not (Tbilisi - 85%; Adjara - 84.4%; Samegrelo - 86%).

## CHAPTER 2.

### Identity, Perception and Acceptance of other Ethnicities/ Nationalities and Social Groups

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This chapter discusses the attitudes of the population surveyed in Adjara, Tbilisi and Samegrelo towards various minorities, including Muslim Georgians, through their answers to different ethnic, national and religious groups. We tried to expand the research topics as much as possible, but the logistics of the field work did not allow us to study attitudes towards all groups at the same time. Therefore, it was necessary to prioritize, and create an overall picture as descriptive and comprehensive as possible. Some examples: Due to the fact that the object of the study was mainly the Georgian-speaking population in the three regions, questions about Abkhazians were asked within the context of the occupied regions of Georgia; since one of the aims of the study was to explore attitudes towards foreign nationalities, we asked about Russians; to discriminate between religious and political factors, we asked respondents what they think about two other orthodox Christian nations, Ukrainians and Greeks. Additionally, to assess attitudes towards the “new” trends in immigration, we noted attitudes towards Turks and Chinese, the nationalities most frequently mentioned in public discourse.

#### To be considered as a Georgian

The study sought the respondents’ answers to the question, what is necessary for a person to be considered a Georgian? There were basically two different answers to this question in all three regions:

- Self-identify, or to consider oneself a Georgian
- Have at least one Georgian parent.

The first factor focuses on the awareness of being a Georgian and self-identification, and the second one refers to a factor of heredity. We found that both fac-

tors were important for the respondents, yet with some nuances: in Tbilisi and Adjara priority is given to the experience/awareness of being Georgian (Tbilisi - 35.3%; Adjara - 33.4%), while the heredity factor – the parent's Georgianness – is almost as strong in Tbilisi (32.3%) and slightly less so in Samegrelo (28.3%).

Within focus groups in all three regions participants were less likely to evoke self-identification, unlike the findings of our quantitative research. Instead they mentioned kinship through “blood”, and religious factors in their definitions of Georgianness. Respondents in all three regions frequently quoted Ilia Chavchavadze's definition of a nation as “Language, Homeland, Faith” Thus, some Muslims in Adjara noted problems fueled by a strong ethno-confessional nationalist narrative from the 1980s. They perceive being considered by other Georgians as unreliable and threatening, a narrative according to which “Georgianness” is only compatible with Orthodoxy.

Young men in Tbilisi, while not excluding the acceptance of other religions (since “Christianity does not condemn other religions”) expressed somewhat contradictory views on the definition of Georgianness, believing that Orthodoxy was the main sign of Georgian identity. Some of them also said that Orthodoxy should be endorsed as a state religion.

*“The experience of being a Georgian does not necessarily mean that a Georgian has to be an Orthodox Christian. However, we should not lose one of the signs of our identity-- that we are historically an Orthodox country. The state religion must be orthodox and also my perception is that I live in an Orthodox country.”<sup>9</sup>*

Some of the respondents associated Georgianness with a genetic factor, or a ‘blood’ relation.

*“Georgianness comes from the blood. Genetics is paramount. A person of another nationality may be a very good Georgian mentally, even a hero, but he still cannot be a Georgian. To be a Georgian genetically, there should be at least a succession of nine generations.”<sup>10</sup>*

However, some in focus groups expressed the opinion that Georgianness is about self-perception, and that “it does not matter who your mother or father is, it matters who you are.”<sup>11</sup> In their view, the citizenship is decisive, because it does not look at religion, skin color, or genetic code.

9 Tbilisi 25- y/o man.

10 Ibid.

11 Almost identical citations were pronounced in both in young women's and young men's focus groups in Tbilisi.

## Findings:

- There is no broad consensus on 'being Georgian'. Two main factors were named: self-identification as a Georgian and having at least one Georgian parent. Neither of these was supported by more than a third of the respondents.

## Religious rights of Muslim Georgians

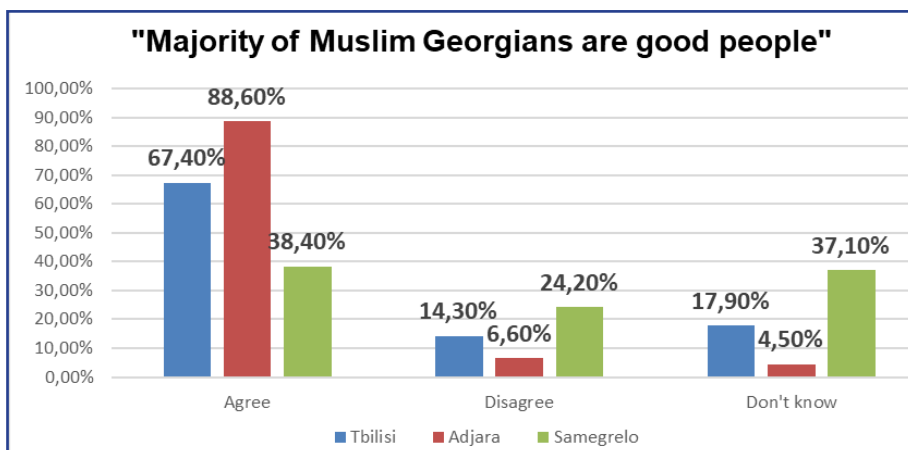
The study paid special attention to the identity of Muslim Georgians and their religious rights<sup>12</sup>. As opposed to other regions, Samegrelo had the most supporters of the opinion that "building mosques for Muslim Georgians and performing Muslim religious rituals hinders consensus and unification among Georgians" (38.3%). This figure is 22.7% in Tbilisi and 12.8% in Adjara.

There was a big difference between the regions in terms of those who think that "Muslim Georgians should be given the opportunity to have mosques and participate in religious rituals." In Samegrelo this figure was lowest - 26.8%, while the highest was in Adjara - 70.3%, and in Tbilisi the statement was shared by 61.7% of respondents.

In Tbilisi 67.4% of the respondents and in Samegrelo 38.4% completely or somewhat agreed to the question "Are most Muslim Georgians good people?" In Adjara the figure was 88.6%. Meanwhile 14.3% of the respondents in Tbilisi, 24.2% in Samegrelo and 6.6% in Adjara completely or somewhat disagreed. More than a third of the respondents in Samegrelo, 37.1%, said "did not know" (17.9% in Tbilisi and 4.5% in Adjara) (**Figure 2**).

21

**Figure 2.**



In the Samegrelo focus groups a significant percentage of respondents felt ambivalent towards Georgian Muslims. Although they admitted that they were “real Georgians”, they still believed that religion was important for being a Georgian.

*“Religion and traditional practices matter; a Georgian must be an Orthodox Christian.”<sup>13</sup>*

Discussing religious issues in a broader context exposed discriminatory tendencies by Orthodox Christians towards the participation of other religious groups in political or public life. For some respondents, it would be clearly unacceptable to see a non-Orthodox in a high political position. When asked in the focus groups whether they would elect a follower of another religion as President, the answer was often negative. For many Orthodox participants from different age groups it was also unacceptable to marry a non-Orthodox, including a Muslim Georgian. According to some, the unity of Georgians is based on religion. They also were dissatisfied with the fact that there is no active policy towards conversion to Christianity of the young people living in the Adjara Mountains.

A group of young Christians in Adjara were also suspecting the presence of likely anti-State aspects in religious teaching in madrassas.

*“Nobody knows what they are being taught and when it will pop-up.”<sup>14</sup>*

22

### **Findings:**

- Samegrelo is characterized by intolerance towards the religious rights of Georgian Muslims.
- Some members of Christian groups don't favor allowing Muslim religious schools.

### **Sense of pride/shame**

When asked a question, **has it ever happened that you were ashamed of being Georgian?** the vast majority of the respondents in all three regions replied in the negative. Feeling proud of being Georgian is most pronounced in Adjara (79.6%), however it is also high in Tbilisi (64%) and Samegrelo (64.3%). Some respondents stated that it rarely happened to them to feel ashamed of being Georgian; the number of such respondents is higher in Tbilisi (17.3%) than in Adjara (12.1%) or Samegrelo (9%).

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13 Ibid.

14 Adjara, a Christian man.

## Findings:

- ➡ The majority in all three regions have never experienced shame for being Georgian. Respondents in Samegrelo are the proudest to be Georgian.

## **Preservation of traditions**

In the next stage of the survey our respondents expressed their opinions about **who are the best at preserving their traditions - Jews, Christians, Muslims or followers of other religions?**

Significant differences appeared between the regions. The opinion that **Jews** are the best at observing their traditions was especially supported in Tbilisi (30%). One-third of Adjarans, the largest ratio in this region, thought that **followers of all religions** are equally good at preserving their traditions (32.6%). As for Samegrelo, most respondents (51.2%) gave priority to **Christians**.

## Findings:

- ➡ People in Tbilisi believe that traditions are best observed by Jews, while in Samegrelo they think Christians are the best at observing tradition and in Adjara most think everyone observes traditions to the same extent.

23

## **Good Orthodox Christians**

At the next stage our respondents had to assess **how well Orthodox Christians from different nationalities practice their religion**. The question included Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks and Georgians. “Yes-No” answers were distributed between two opposite poles.

**Ukrainians** were considered the best Orthodox in Samegrelo (67.2%), half of Tbilisi respondents (51.1%) shared this opinion; while in Adjara the opinion was moderately shared (42.8%).

The opinions about **Greeks** were approximately the same, although they were rated with the highest positive opinions in Tbilisi (55.1%) and Samegrelo (52.1%). Adjara respondents were slightly more reserved (46.2%).

**Russians** were perceived as the best Orthodox in Samegrelo (66.1%). In Tbilisi this figure was 49%, and in Adjara 47.8%.

In all three regions, respondents said **Georgians** are considered to be good Orthodox Christians. In Tbilisi this figure was 72.6%, in Adjara it was 76.5% and in Samegrelo 90.9%. However a significant portion of Tbilisians and Adjarians (14.2% and 12.2% respectively) did not consider Georgians to be good Orthodox Christians, while in Samegrelo this category was only 1.5%.

Strong self-esteem from an Orthodox perspective was especially visible in the focus groups. While a significant part of the believers emphasized that only Georgia is a true Orthodox country, as they did not shut the doors of churches for believers on Easter night. We also noticed the signs of the image of the enemy who is attacking us because of our faith.

*“We are the strongest Orthodox country and that is why “they” are attacking us.”<sup>15</sup>*

The statement that a **good orthodox Christian person respects other religions** was completely or somewhat adhered to by the vast majority of respondents in all three regions (97.1% in Tbilisi, 91.9% in Adjara and 91.1% in Samegrelo).

### **Findings:**

24

- ➔ Georgians consider themselves as the best Orthodox Christians in all three regions.
- ➔ Among other nationalities, Russians and Ukrainians were most positively assessed as good Orthodox in Samegrelo, while Greeks were considered the best Orthodox in Tbilisi.
- ➔ Differences between regions were noticeable; Adjara was the most skeptical about the orthodoxy of other nations, Samegrelo is the most positive.
- ➔ The vast majority in all three regions admit that a good Orthodox Christian person respects other faiths as well.

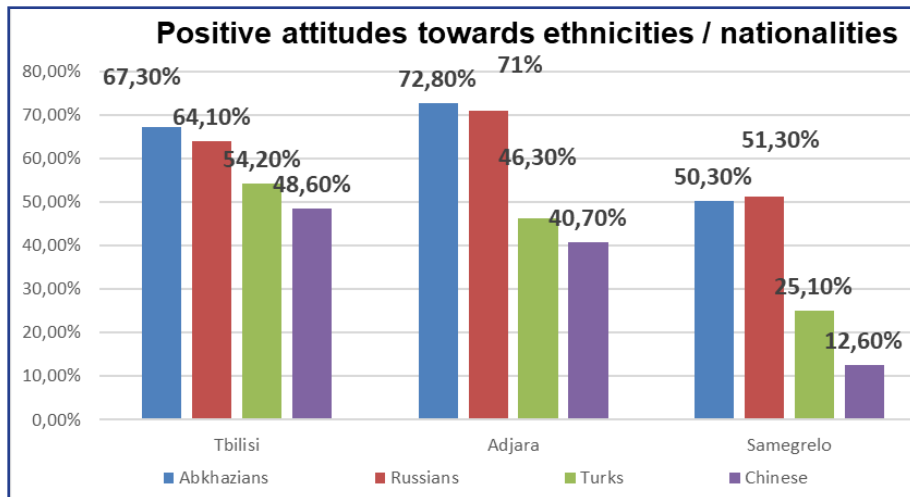
### **Assessment of Ethnicities / Nationalities**

At the next stage of the survey we asked our respondents whether they believed that **most members of a particular nationality, ethnic or religious group were good people**. The question was asked in regard to Abkhazians, Russians, Turks, and Chinese (**Figure 3**).

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15 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o man.

Figure 3.



Slightly more than a half of the population of Samegrelo had a positive opinion about **Abkhazians** (50.3%), while 72.8% of the population of Adjara and 67.3% of Tbilisians believe that most of them are good people. The skeptical attitude towards Abkhazians in the focus groups in Samegrelo was mainly corroborated by two arguments; that they had taken their land and are currently treating Georgians very badly who still remain there:

*“If they were good people, they would not have kicked me out of my house and made me a refugee. Can’t you see what condition those who stayed are in?”<sup>16</sup>*

Attitudes towards **Russians** in all three regions were generally positive, although there was a substantial difference in opinions. In particular, Adjara (71%) is especially positive, followed by Tbilisi (64.1%), while in Samegrelo the figure is the lowest (51.3%). Accordingly, 27.2% of our respondents in Tbilisi, 22.1% in Adjara, and 30% in Samegrelo disagree with the statement that most Russians are good people. However, despite their favorable attitudes towards Russians, none of the respondents in any of the three regions had any doubts about the Russian occupation of Georgian territories.

In general, positive sentiments towards Russia and Russians were evident in the focus groups in Adjara. The respondents attribute this to close economic links, including the abundance of Russian tourists and the material benefits derived from it. They also mentioned the kinship ties, i.e. many mixed families.

The historical memory and the factor of Turkey were also important, to which a large part of the population is quite sensitive:

*“Many people here have Russian relatives, some have Russian mothers, and some have fathers. We have a lot of mixed families.”<sup>17</sup>*

*“The Turks are unnerving our people, the Russians are not, though they have carried out an occupation, but I am calmer (with Russians) - unlike with the Turks - because of the past times.”<sup>18</sup>*

Many young respondents in Samegrelo and Tbilisi emphasized that there is stronger nostalgia for Russians among older people:

*The elderly people are very fond of the Russians; they always tell us how much they could do for 40 rubles. That is why they still prefer the Russians.”<sup>19</sup>*

Between the three regions, opinions about **Turks** differed. In Tbilisi positive assessments prevailed; in Samegrelo more negative ones; and mixed opinions were found in Adjara. In particular, only most Tbilisians (54.2%) completely or somewhat agreed with the statement that most Turks are good people. In Adjara and Samegrelo the figures are only 46.3% and 25.1%, respectively.

Attitudes towards Turks in Adjara are divergent. Positive views of one part of the respondents were based on the constructive role of the Turks in modern Adjara, while others expressed their dislike, as they believe that most Turks are driven by imperial intentions towards Adjara.

*“I think investments are good, including the Turkish ones in Adjara. I am not at all irritated by Turks, and - unlike some people-- I do not favor Islamophobic sentiment, on the contrary I like diversity.”<sup>20</sup>*

*“Even in their textbooks they write that Adjara is Turkey; they will never forget those 300 years.”<sup>21</sup>*

Diverse results were also observed in relation to **Chinese**. The fewest who agreed with the statement that most the Chinese are good people were in Samegrelo (12.6%), while in Tbilisi this figure was 48.6% and in Adjara 40.7%. Samegrelo also has the highest number with a negative attitude towards Chinese (43.6%).

17 Adjara, a Christian man.

18 Ibid.

19 Samegrelo, a woman.

20 Adjara, a Christian woman.

21 Ibid.

## Findings:

- The highest degree of xenophobia is recorded in Samegrelo, with a significant difference in this regard between Samegrelo and both Adjara and Tbilisi. This applies to Abkhazians as well as Russians, Turks and Chinese.
- The population of Adjara is the most positive towards Russians, while Samegrelo is the least positive.
- While assessing Turks, positive opinions prevail in Tbilisi, in Samegrelo negative ones prevail and in Adjara the attitudes diverge.
- Attitudes towards the Chinese are the most negative. In this respect, regional differences are even more pronounced. In particular, Tbilisi is about four times less judgmental than Samegrelo.

## The perception of ethnic groups' / other nationalities' attitudes towards Georgia

It is revealing to understand how respondents perceive the attitudes of other ethnic groups and nationalities towards Georgia. For example, in all three regions they do not believe that most **Turks** want good for Georgia. In Tbilisi this figure is 48.1%, in Adjara 57.5%, and in Samegrelo 53.4%.

Negative attitude against Turks were most evident in the focus groups of Adjara. Several respondents, especially women and girls, stated that for their own safety they were afraid to pass through those neighborhoods in Batumi where Turks live compactly and/or work. However, when asked if they had any personal negative experience in this regard, they couldn't recall any. Some of the respondents shared social and political explanations of the anti-Turkish attitudes, saying that they feared the population of Turks would increase and that they would be the dominant group, further leading to a shift in political power, or in an extreme case, even the loss of the region.

*"I do not know what kind of policy Turkey pursues, but most Turks have an imperialist mindset. They think that if Adjara was theirs for 300 years, then it is still theirs. I do not mean all Turks are like this, but they massively believe it."*<sup>22</sup>

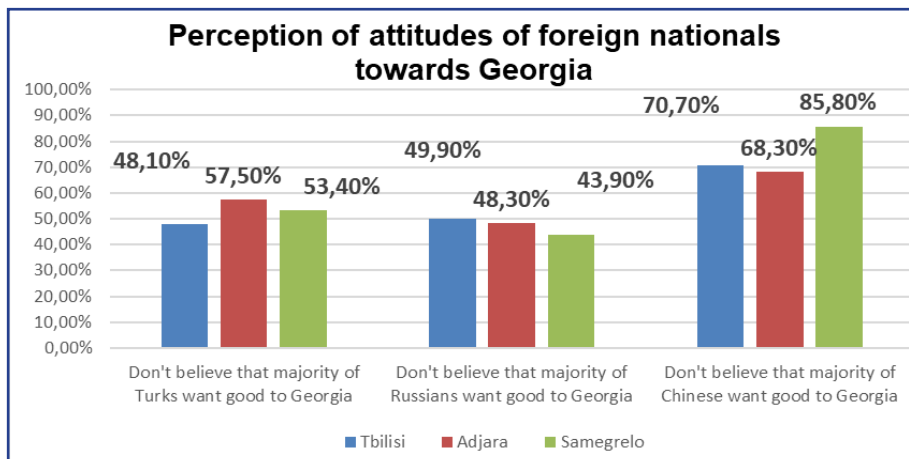
Young women in Tbilisi focus groups confirmed their hostility towards foreigners living in Georgia, which mainly applied to Arabs, Turks and Iranians, and due to inappropriate behavior by the members of these groups towards Georgian girls (for example, intrusive forms of communication, speaking to them or catcalling, staring at them, or following them). The women insisted their

22 Adjara, a 25- y/o Christian man.

distrust was not because of ethnicity or religion.

Samegrelo respondents were most skeptical to the statement that “Most **Russians** want good for Georgia” (only 30.1% believe this against 43.9% who do not). The figures in Adjara and Tbilisi were 34.1% vs. 49.9% and 42.3% vs. 48.3%, respectively (**Figure 4**).

**Figure 4.**



In all three regions, most of the focus group participants equated the Russian occupation of the Georgian territories with the attitude of most Russians towards Georgia.

*“We have seen nothing but wrong from the Russians, for instance the occupation, and why should we think that they want good for us?”<sup>23</sup>*

A significant number of our respondents say that Russians are good people but Russian policy is bad. Public attitudes in the regions are divergent because on one hand they think that most Russians are good people, while on the other hand they say that Russians do not wish good for Georgia. Some young respondents stressed that it's important to differentiate between the people and the politics. When talking about the people, respondents rely on their personal experience with a particular Russian individual, while their attitude towards the country of Russia is assessed through the prism of President Putin's policies. Thus “people” means “individuals” as opposed to the attitudes towards Georgia by Kremlin's official circles.

23 Adjara, a Christian woman.

The most negative attitudes towards the **Chinese** were found in Samegrelo, where only 14.2% of respondents believe that the Chinese want good for Georgia; this figure is even lower than the answers by respondents in Tbilisi and Adjara (29.3% and 31.7%, respectively). Negative attitudes towards Chinese are particularly strong. There are stereotypes that the Chinese “colonize” territories and that they are culturally unacceptable, for example because “they eat dogs”. Again, religion is mentioned as the main criterion, although the younger generation has a different, relatively liberal perception. Yet the respondents in the focus groups stated that they had had no direct contact with the Chinese.

*“It does not matter to us whether a person is a Chinese or not; I don’t divide people by their skin color.”<sup>24</sup>*

## Findings:

- ➡ Most people in all three regions do not believe that most Turks, Russians and Chinese want good for Georgia. The most skeptical attitudes are detected in Samegrelo. There is more friendliness towards Russians in Adjara.

## Creating a family with a person of another ethnicity / nationality / religion

29

To assess the acceptance of different ethnic, national and religious groups by our respondents, they were offered to imagine the following situation: **“Suppose you have a child who wants to create a family with a person of a different nationality/religion. Will you try to change this decision?”** The question was asked in regard to Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Turks, Chinese, Ossetians, Muslim Georgians and Abkhazians.

According to the poll, Tbilisi had the most non-judgmental attitude towards founding a family with a **German**, where the figure reaches 68.3% positives. The most negative attitudes were found in Samegrelo, where the number of the people who would not try to influence their child’s decision is almost the same as the number of the people who would try to prevent their child from marrying a German - 46.5% and 43.3%, respectively. The ratio of the opponents to such a marriage in Adjara was significantly lower (32.7%), and even lower in Tbilisi (26.3%).

Attitudes towards the decision to start a family with a **Russian** were practically the same as for marrying a German: the most positive were respondents in Tbilisi, the least positive in Samegrelo. The percentages were positive for 67.6% in Tbilisi, 47.9% in Samegrelo, and 59% in Adjara; negative opinions

<sup>24</sup> Tbilisi, a 25- y/o woman.

were 26.7% in Tbilisi, 34.8% in Adjara and 39.5% in Samegrelo.

The picture is similar in the case of marrying a **Ukrainian**. Samegrelo is again the most negative, while Adjara and Tbilisi are significantly less judgmental, with positive opinions at 51.2% in Samegrelo, 71.6% in Tbilisi and 61.4% in Adjara.

Our respondents' views changed when it came to starting a family with a **Turk** or a **Chinese**. In both cases, most our respondents stated that they would try to change their child's mind (those interviewed in Samegrelo especially). Responses were as follows:

- Would try to change the decision to marry a Turk: in Tbilisi - 52.2%; In Adjara - 53%; In Samegrelo - 77.6%
- Would try to change the decision to marry a Chinese: in Tbilisi - 53.6%; In Adjara - 54.2%; In Samegrelo - 81.5%.

Most our respondents in Tbilisi (55.8%) stated that they would not try to change their child's decision to start a family with an **Ossetian**. This opinion is shared by 49.8% of the respondents in Adjara. Again in Samegrelo a different situation was observed - 63.9% of respondents would try to change their child's decision. The percentage for this answer was lowest in Tbilisi - 36.1%, and in Adjara - 39.8%.

30

Most (58.5%) Tbilisians are not against starting a family with **Abkhazians**, with a similar figure recorded in Adjara (58.2%), however in Samegrelo only about half as many (30.5%) would do so. In Tbilisi 44.7% were against their child marrying an Abkhazian, with 31.9% in Adjara, and 55.5% in Samegrelo.

The views of Tbilisians on marrying a **Muslim Georgian** were divided: 45.4% would not oppose it while an almost identical proportion (44.7%) – would oppose it. The population of Samegrelo is categorical in this regard - 74% are against their child's marriage with a Muslim Georgian, while only 19.5% would not oppose it. In Adjara, the ratio of opponents to marry a Muslim is only 20.1% and of those who would accept it, 73%.

When it comes to marriage, focus groups are less judgmental towards Christian groups. There were practically no negative attitudes towards the Russians, Ukrainians or generally, "Europeans".

*"I would marry a Russian if I fell in love. They are Christians too [...] my priest will not protest, I know, but I would not marry a boy of another religion even if I loved him."*<sup>25</sup>

The most negative attitudes were recorded towards the **Chinese**.

Christian respondents, especially those who have a priest, strongly oppose marrying a Muslim. In Samegrelo there is resistance to intermarriage with Abkhazians and with Muslim Georgians. Although the latter are considered being their 'flesh and blood', we encountered some respondents who regard their religious affiliation, Orthodoxy, above their ethnicity.

*"I, for one, will not marry a follower of another faith, no matter how much I love them, and I still love God more."<sup>26</sup>*

### **Findings:**

- The religious factor is important in marriage.
- Marrying a German, a Russian, and a Ukrainian is viewed most leniently in Tbilisi, less favorably in Samegrelo.
- In all three regions, the majority don't favor marriage with a Turk or Chinese, especially in Samegrelo and relatively less so in Tbilisi.
- For most Tbilisians, unlike in Samegrelo, it is acceptable for a family member to marry an Abkhazian or Ossetian.
- In Samegrelo, negative attitudes against marrying a Georgian Muslim prevail; the number of opponents is almost four times higher than in Adjara. The low acceptance of Muslim Georgians in Samegrelo is practically identical to that of Turks and Chinese, with a low level of acceptance of Abkhazians as well.

31

## **Acceptance of foreign tourists**

The survey measured respondents' attitudes towards foreign tourists by expressing their opinion on whether they welcome foreign tourists to Georgia or not. The absolute majority of respondents in each region saw tourists' visits to Georgia in a positive light: Tbilisi - 98.4%, Adjara - 99%, Samegrelo - 91.7%.

Over all three regions, a total of only 1.2% of respondents indicated that they do not welcome foreign tourists' visits. Among tourists regarded negatively were Russians, Turks, Iranians, Chinese, Arabs and people of color.

### **Findings:**

- The vast majority in all three regions welcomes the visits of foreign tourists to Georgia.

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<sup>26</sup> Adjara, a Christian woman.

## Right to citizenship

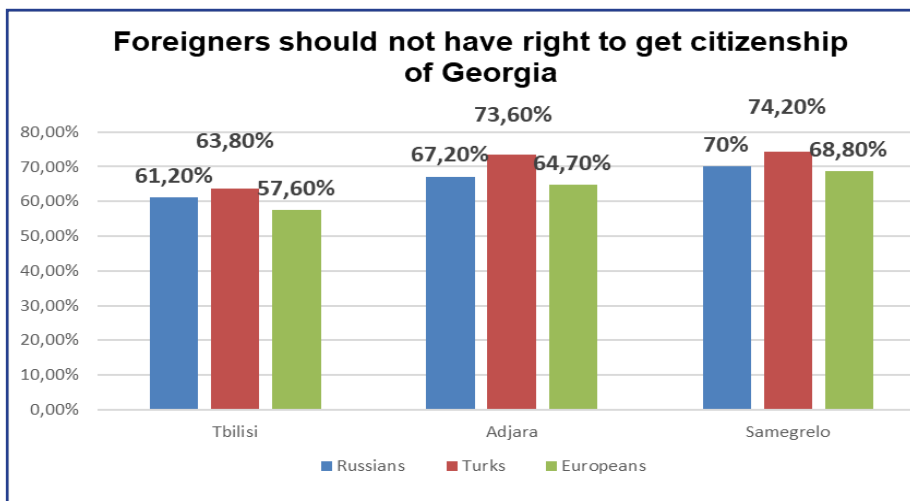
The study explored public attitudes towards citizenship with the following question – **Should Turks, Russians and Europeans who would like to live in Georgia have the right, or not, to obtain Georgian citizenship if the relevant requirements are met?**

For **Turks**, the vast majority of the population surveyed of in all three regions (Tbilisi - 63.8%, Adjara - 73.6%, Samegrelo - 74.2%) believe that they should *not* have the right to Georgian citizenship. The largest percentage who thinks that Turks *should* have the right to obtain Georgian citizenship was in Tbilisi (28.5%), while in Samegrelo only 13.9% supported this.

For **Russians** also, most respondents do not support granting them citizenship. In Tbilisi 61.2% are against it, 67.2% in Adjara, and 70% in Samegrelo. The issue is most supported by Tbilisi respondents (30.8%), and least supported in Samegrelo (19.1%).

The attitudes are slightly milder towards **“Europeans”**. Respondents in Tbilisi, Adjara, and Samegrelo who support granting citizenship to Europeans range from 22% to 36%. Here again, **Tbilisi** is the most lenient (35.6%). However, most respondents still have a negative attitude: 57.6% of the population surveyed in Tbilisi thinks Europeans should not be given this right; 64.7% have the same attitude in Adjara, and 68.8% in Samegrelo (**Figure 5**).

**Figure 5.**



In the focus groups most respondents are skeptical about granting citizenship to foreigners and think the procedures should be strict.

*“Instead of scrutinizing a foreigner, they started distributing passports in buckets. They drove foreigners in and gave them citizenship.”<sup>27</sup>*

In their opinion, a lenient approach poses an existential threat to Georgians.

*“A thousand will come, then a thousand will become ten thousand, then even more, and in the end they will be more than us; they will elect their government, they may even be called Georgians, but they will be others.”*

Some brought in social factors as an argument. There were some individuals who shared discriminatory attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups born in Georgia. Some saw no problem in restoring Georgian citizenship to ethnic Georgians who adopted citizenship of another country. However when asked what they thought of an ethnically non-Georgian person, born and raised here but who later acquired citizenship in another country, then wanted to restore his or her Georgian citizenship, many said that they wouldn't support this. Moreover, some even demanded stripping of citizenship from those who do not speak Georgian.

*“Let's give them three years, if they learn - they will be citizens, if they do not learn it - they will lose their citizenship.”<sup>28</sup>*

33

*“Let them learn it, or go to the country the language of which they speak fluently.”<sup>29</sup>*

*“(In places) where those minorities live, I think that's not Georgia at all, they purposefully do not speak Georgian to you.”*

*“Those Russians in Batumi have lived there for almost a century; don't they deserve to be kicked out? They have not learned a halfpenny's worth of Georgian for so long.”<sup>30</sup>*

However, some respondents, especially in the youth groups, supported granting citizenship to foreigners by a simplified procedure.

*“We need new experience, new people, new ideas. If we do not open our doors, we will be captured in the past centuries.”<sup>31</sup>*

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27 Tbilisi, a 45+ y/o man.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Samegrelo, a man.

31 Adjara, a Christian man.

## Findings:

- ➡ In all three regions most respondents were not in favor of granting citizenship to foreigners. Tbilisi is the most lenient, Samegrelo is the most skeptical.

## The right to buy real estate<sup>32</sup>

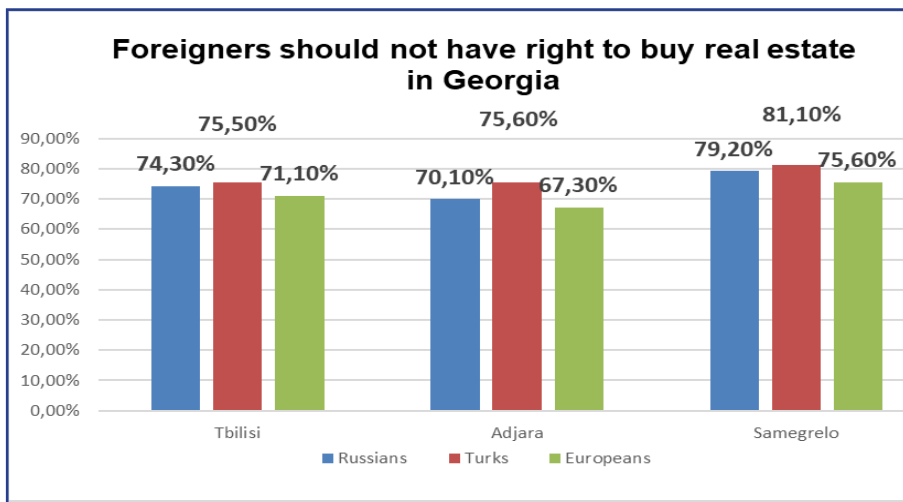
As for **granting foreign nationals the right to buy real estate**, the vast majority of respondents in all three regions believe **Turks** should not have this right, with 75.5% of respondents sharing this opinion in Tbilisi, 75.6% in Adjara and 81.1% in Samegrelo. The largest percentage of those who think that Turks *should* be given the right to buy property was recorded in the Adjara region (22.3%).

As for **Russians**, the ratios of respondents who think they should *not* have the right to buy real estate vary from 70% to 80%. Adjara is the most lenient where 28.3% believe they should.

Attitudes towards **Europeans** were skeptical too, though slightly more lenient compared to Turks and Russians. Opposition to the right to buy real estate was: Samegrelo 75.6%, Tbilisi 71.1% and Adjara 67.3% (**Figure 6**).

34

Figure 6.



32 The questionnaire did not specify the type of real estate, however, when we had focus group discussions, almost everybody addressed these issues in the context of agricultural land.

Most of our respondents in the focus groups were against the transfer of ownership of land to foreign nationals due to a perceived demographic threat that foreigners would gradually oppress and eventually expel Georgians from their own land, or assimilate them.

*“Did our ancestors shed their blood to let us betray the land soaked with their blood so treacherously?”<sup>33</sup>*

According to some of the respondents, the land can be only leased to foreigners and only if they make large investments. One of our respondents who had a priest took a sharp stance while discussing the real estate and even called the sale of land to foreigners “treason”. He also added that a similar view prevails in his parish.

*“I have also heard from our parishioners that selling land is treason against the homeland.”<sup>34</sup>*

There were differing views as well as some regarded the sale of real estate to foreigners, including agricultural land, in a positive light. Their main arguments were to attract investments, introduce new technologies, etc. Some believed it was irrational not using land as a resource.

*“These lands will stay in Georgia. And now we neither develop them nor give it to others, so meanwhile they can be used for good.”<sup>35</sup>*

*“A mean dog neither eats itself nor let’s others eat. Instead of keeping it idle it’s better to rent it out.”<sup>36</sup>*

### **Findings:**

- ➔ In all three regions the majority is against allowing foreigners to buy real estate. This attitude that is strongest in Samegrelo and more lenient in Adjara.
- ➔ In all three regions, buying real estate by foreigners is viewed more negatively than granting them citizenship.

33 Tbilisi, a 45+ y/o man.

34 Tbilisi, a 45+ y/o woman.

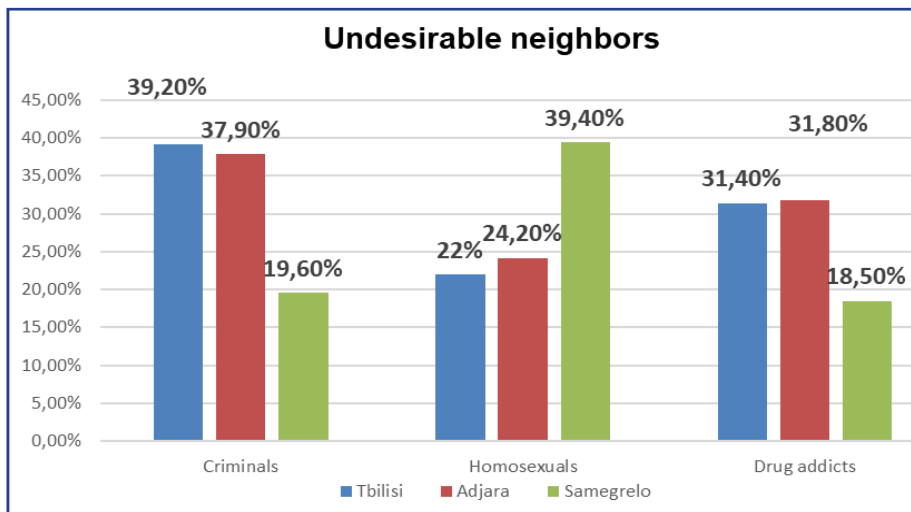
35 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o man.

36 Adjara, a Muslim man.

## An undesirable neighbor

At the next stage of the survey, the respondents were introduced to a card with a list of specific types of people, whom they would identify as **their most undesirable neighbors** (Figure 7).

Figure 7.



In Tbilisi, 39.2% of respondents named a **criminal** as their most undesirable neighbor, followed by a **drug addict** (31.4%) and a **homosexual** (22%).

Very similar results were recorded in Adjara - 37.9% concerning criminals, 31.8% - drug addicts, and 24.2% - homosexuals.

In Samegrelo, 39.4% of respondents did not want to have homosexuals as neighbors, followed by criminals (19.6%) and drug addicts (18.5%).<sup>37</sup>

The focus groups in Samegrelo also demonstrated a clear intolerance of homosexuals, and almost unanimously said that they do not want to have homosexuals as neighbors.

*"I would not be able to let my child outside."*<sup>38</sup>

37 The list also included: "black people", "people following a different religion", "people of different nationality", "foreigners coming from European countries", "people having different political views", "Foreigners coming from Asian countries", "other".

38 Samegrelo, a man.

*“I really do not want to live in fear.”<sup>39</sup>*

Similar views were expressed or approved by virtually all members of the focus group. Only for one respondent, the most unwanted neighbor would be a drug addict. However, this respondent was not distinguished by tolerance towards homosexuals either.

*“If (the drug-addict) runs short of drugs he/she won’t spare anyone. A homosexual will not harm another person and I don’t care what he does in his house ... even if he breaks his neck.”<sup>40</sup>*

### **Findings:**

- ➔ In all three regions, the top three undesirable social groups in the neighborhood are the same: criminals, drug addicts, homosexuals.
- ➔ Criminals are leading among the undesirable in Tbilisi and Adjara, and homosexuals are most unwanted in Samegrelo.

## **Gender issues and inheritance**

The survey also addressed the issue of **gender equality** in the context of division of property (namely, a dwelling) between children of different genders.

37

Answers were clearly patriarchal in nature, with differences between the regions, however. For example, the opinion that a dwelling should be left to the **girl** does not exceed 2% in all three regions, while whether it should be left to the **boy** is 53.8% in Samegrelo. However the latter opinion is significantly lower in Tbilisi - 18.7%, and - 40.8% in Adjara. There is also a significant difference with the answer that the dwelling should be divided **equally**. 75.7% think so in Tbilisi, 54.5% in Adjara and 41.6% in Samegrelo.

### **Findings:**

- ➔ There are clear patriarchal attitudes that emerge when deciding who inherits property—male or female descendants. In Samegrelo and Adjara, sons are given priority, while in Tbilisi there is more equality.

### **Key findings:**

- ➔ In these three regions nativist attitudes are strong, as well as ethno-nationalist and ethno-confessional narratives.

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39      Ibid.

40      Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3.

### Trust towards Institutions



In addition to state institutions such as the President, Prime minister, Parliament and the Judiciary (courts), we also asked our respondents to rate trust towards the military and the church, as well as towards international organizations such as the European Union and the Eurasian Union. The study of trust towards these institutions was important in order to understand the level of acceptance of radical groups and the level of trust towards institutions that disseminate liberal democratic values in Georgia. Measuring trust towards state institutions provides priceless information on anti-establishment attitudes, which is an important feature of populism.

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In addition, we were interested in the attitude of the population of the three regions towards ultra-right groups and the non-governmental sector. To avoid confusion, we tried to make the wording of the question as clear as possible, and chose the most recognizable subjects, such as the radical rightist “Georgian March” and liberal “Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association,” respectively. The questions were formulated as follows: “Do you trust or distrust organizations such as, the Georgian March?” And “Do you trust or distrust organizations such as the Young Lawyers’ Association?” Additionally, we also measured trust towards Georgian journalists.

#### The President

Trust towards the President of Georgia was mainly negative in all three regions. Tbilisians were most negative: almost half of the respondents in Tbilisi (49.4%) were radically negative (“I completely distrust”), while 28% “somewhat distrust” the President. A very small ratio (3.1%) completely trust the President, while 11.5% somewhat trust her. In Samegrelo, a total of 62.6% distrust the President (with 32.8% who completely distrust). Only 3.9% express complete trust and 17.2% “somewhat trust”. In Adjara, they trust the President the most (12% trust completely, 27.2% somewhat); at the same time, 34.2% completely distrust and 19.5% somewhat distrust.

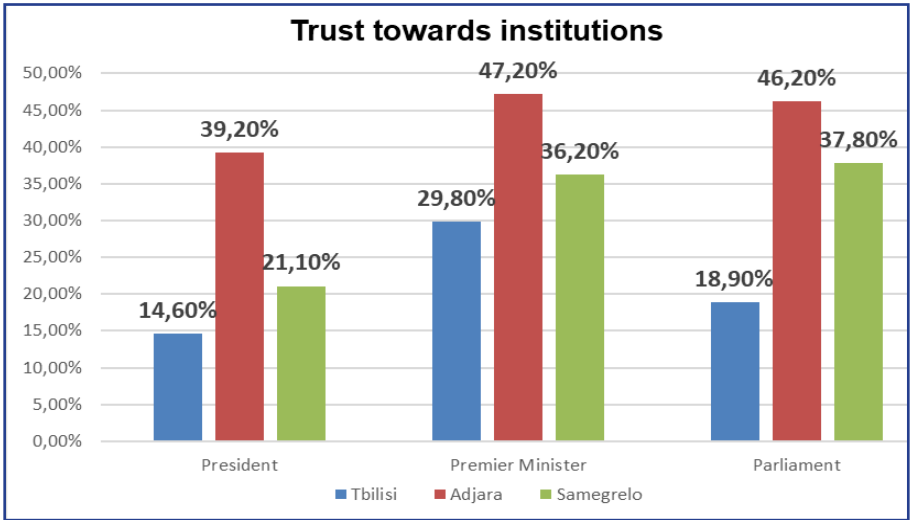
Distrust towards the President in the focus groups was mainly explained by two reasons. First, the respondents do not consider her a good political leader. Second, participants didn't see any role at all for a President in the current political system.

# The Prime Minister

The statistical analysis of the survey results showed that the level of trust towards the Prime Minister exceeds the level of trust towards the President, although it varies by region. Those who distrust the Prime Minister were the most in Tbilisi (total of 70.2% distrust, of which 44.7% completely distrust). The attitudes towards the PM in Adjara and Samegrelo were divided; those who trusted and distrusted the Prime Minister were approximately the same, but in Samegrelo there was more focus on distrust (45.8%) than on trust (36.2%). In Adjara, positive and negative opinions were similar, with a total of 45.5% who completely or somewhat distrusted and a total of 47.2% who completely or somewhat trusted the Prime Minister.

Focus groups respondents noted that their trust towards the PM had increased in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants in Samegrelo focus groups were more positive, where young people emphasized the role of the PM in the course of the pandemic, saying that he managed to keep “peace” in the country. Nevertheless, especially among youth, there was strong dissatisfaction with the actions of the Prime Minister during the events of the last summer<sup>41</sup> (Figure 8).

Figure 8.



41 Here we mean violent disperse of anti-governmental protest in June 21, 2019, dubbed by journalists as “Gavrilov Night”. See:

## The Parliament

The respondents also rated their trust towards the Parliament of Georgia. Again, negative opinions prevail in all three regions. Tbilisians still have a particularly negative attitude towards Parliament: almost half of the respondents (49.7%) express complete distrust, while another third (31.4%) say that they somewhat distrust it (a total of 81.1%). The rate of distrust is relatively lower in Adjara and Samegrelo, but still high (62.2% in Samegrelo, 53.8% in Adjara). More people in Adjara completely trust the Parliament of Georgia (12.8%) than in Tbilisi (1.7%) and Samegrelo (4.2%).

Focus group participants in all three regions, of different age or religious groups, of different gender, expressed their distrust towards the Parliament quite aggressively.

*“Are they doing anything good for me in this Parliament? They’re doing nothing, just caring about their own business.”<sup>42</sup>*

## The Courts

40

In terms of trust towards the Courts, were varied. Compared to Adjara, the rate of trust is much lower in Tbilisi and Samegrelo with 29.2% of Tbilisians and 27.3% of those in Samegrelo who trust the courts (most of the answers were: “somewhat trust”), while in Adjara this figure was 40.9%. However, even in Adjara, every second respondent (49.9%) distrusts the Courts. The degree of distrust towards the Courts was especially high in Tbilisi (61.8%). In Samegrelo it was 51%.

## The Army (Military)

In all three regions, respondents who trust the Georgian Army (“completely trust” and “somewhat trust”) are the vast majority (Tbilisi - 68.9%; Adjara - 83.3%; Samegrelo - 76.2%). Regional differences show that more than half of the respondents in Samegrelo (52%) “somewhat trust” the Georgian army. These figures are 42.7% for Tbilisi and 35.9% for Adjara. Adjara had the highest share of respondents who said they completely trusted the Georgian army (47.4%).

## The Church

Trust towards the Georgian Church is significantly high in all three regions (Tbilisi - 73.4%; Adjara - 66.2%; Samegrelo - 86%) and exceeds the trust towards the Army in Tbilisi and Samegrelo. The highest rate of trust was record-

42 Tbilisi, a 45+ y/o woman.

ed in Samegrelo, where more than a half of the respondents (53%) said that they somewhat trust the church, while 33% said that they completely trust it. In Adjara 32.9% somewhat trust, while 33.3% completely trust. In Tbilisi figures are higher than in Adjara, but lower than in Samegrelo – they “somewhat trust” the church at a rate of 42.8% and “completely trust” it at 30.5%.

An interesting trend appeared when analyzing the data. A significant portion of respondents trust the Church but distrust any political institution (President, Prime Minister, Parliament). These make up 45.5% in Tbilisi, 21.3% in Adjara and 38.3% in Samegrelo. If we take only the Orthodox Christians, who are the vast majority of respondents, the figure is even more impressive - more than a half of the 50.6% Orthodox people interviewed in Tbilisi, 29.6% in Adjara and 38.3% in Samegrelo trust the Church but distrust any political institution.

The focus groups opinions about the trust towards the Church were mainly divided between those who had a priest and those who didn't. Respondents without a priest mentioned criminal cases where the clergy had been involved, as well as some obnoxious behavior of some priests, their wealth that is incompatible with their status, and their interference in state affairs. Many pointed out scandals in which the Church has been entangled in recent years.<sup>43</sup> Another opinion, mainly shared by those who had a priest, categorically disagreed with the negative attitudes about the Church. In their view, the Church cannot be judged on specific cases. “It is no business of ours to judge a servant of God.” For many of them, the priest is a role model. Many have said that they trust only the clergy. “I trust my priest and the Patriarch” - this phrase was often used across different focus groups.

## Journalists

Respondents in the three regions shared how much they trust the Georgian journalists. In Tbilisi the ratio of those who trust is lower compared to other regions (40.7%); the rate was 59.3% in Samegrelo and 64.9% in Adjara who say they trust journalists (somewhat or completely).

In the focus groups young people especially criticized journalists as being politically engaged and biased, and that there is also a competence issue.

*“We know which television is under which political wing and which political interests it is voicing.”<sup>44</sup>*

*“The Media are not focusing on reality, but concentrating on special interests that are behind them. They do this to let the interest*

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, several scandals surrounding the church in recent years here: <https://bit.ly/32GpTvk>, <https://bit.ly/31B0nbd>, <https://bit.ly/3hHbaGK>.

<sup>44</sup> Adjara, a Christian woman.

*groups which they are a part of gain influence and then come to power.”<sup>45</sup>*

However, there was another opinion too, mainly in the middle and senior age groups, who, despite their generally skeptical attitude towards the elites, singled out a certain part of journalists and public organizations in which they place their trust, both personally and based on their activities.

Young people do follow developments on traditional media as well as on social networks, despite their general skepticism and sometimes agreed with the views of other respondents, which might have been personally unacceptable to them.

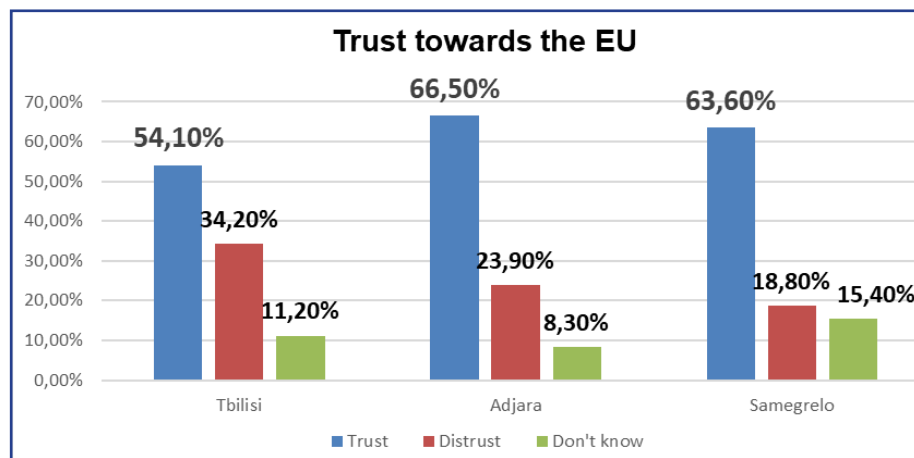
*“I don’t trust journalists, but I get information from them.”<sup>46</sup>*

## The European Union

Respondents rated their trust towards the EU as being positive in all three regions. The lowest rate was found in Tbilisi (54.1%), the highest in Adjara (66.5%), and in Samegrelo the trust rate was 63.6% (**Figure 9**). In all regions focus group participants’ skepticism towards EU was mainly explained by the “false expectations” of membership. Several participants having a priest mentioned the popular cliché of “Europe’s push for same-sex marriage.” This cliché was especially common in Samegrelo.

42

**Figure 9.**



45 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o man.

46 Tbilisi, a 45+ y/o woman.

## Organizations like “Georgian March”

To measure public trust towards radical anti-liberal groups, we asked our respondents about the best-known organization of this kind, “Georgian March”. The question’s wording was as follows: “Do you trust or distrust organizations like Georgian March?” Only 7.6% of respondents in Tbilisi answered in the affirmative, while in Samegrelo 12.6% did and in Adjara, 25.1%. Young Muslims in Adjara focus groups were especially critical towards organizations like Georgian March. According to one of the participants,

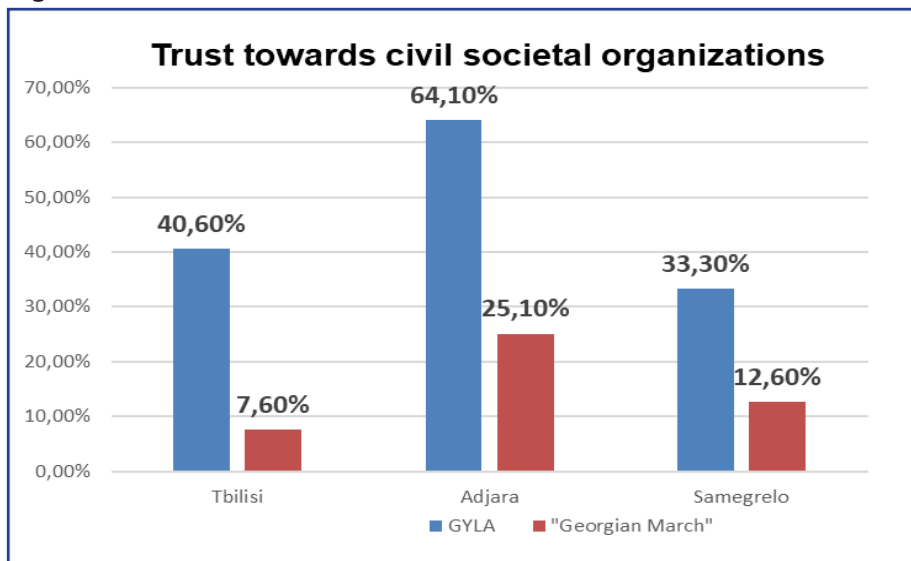
*“They fuel religious nationalism. When I asked their representative a question, first he asked me where I was from, then he asked me my last name and finally he accused me of being a Turk.”*

## Organizations like the “Georgian Young Lawyers Association”

To measure trust towards non-governmental organizations, we selected a well-known human rights organization. The question was worded as follows: “Do you trust or distrust organizations like the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association?” Trust towards such organizations is particularly strong in Adjara (a total of 64.1% trust them). The ratios of those who trust and who distrust such organizations in Tbilisi is almost equal (40.6% trust, 38.6% distrust). One third of the respondents in Samegrelo (33.3%) trust them, which is higher than the number of those who distrust them in this region (28.3%). A significant number of respondents in Samegrelo (27.4%) found it difficult to answer this question (**Figure 10**).

43

**Figure 10.**



Some respondents in the focus groups in all three regions named the organization they trust both personally and based on the organization's activities, and named the leaders of the organization. Some skeptical respondents said that though NGOs are usually unacceptable for them, they still listen to some of their interviews on television.

### **Findings:**

- In all three regions, distrust towards the President significantly prevails over trust. The top figure of the country is the least trusted in Tbilisi.
- Trust towards the Prime Minister is also low, though higher compared to the President. Tbilisi is the most skeptical.
- The respondents in the focus groups noted that attitudes towards the Prime Minister had improved in the wake of the pandemic crisis.
- Trust towards the Parliament is the lowest compared to other state institutions in all three regions. Tbilisi again holds the most negative stance.
- The majority in all three regions do not trust the Courts; the most skeptical being Tbilisi.
- Trust towards the Army is traditionally high in all three regions.
- Trust towards the Church is high and even exceeds the trust towards the Army in two of the three regions. The Church is most trusted in Samegrelo.<sup>47</sup>
- Trust towards the EU is high in all three regions. However, Tbilisi lags behind the other two regions in this attitude.
- Organizations like Georgian March are most trusted in Adjara, the least trusted in Tbilisi. Muslim Georgians are particularly critical towards them.
- Organizations like the Young Lawyers' Association are more trusted in Adjara, less in Samegrelo. The level of trust in Tbilisi is slightly higher than the level of distrust.
- Most people in Samegrelo and Adjara trust journalists, but in Tbilisi they don't trust them. Young people in the focus groups were most critical.

### **Key Findings:**

- The most critical towards authorities are in Tbilisi, and the most trusting are in Adjara.
- In all three regions, the Church, the liberal-minded public organization, and the Media are trusted more than the authorities.
- Trust towards the Army is very high.

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<sup>47</sup> The questions of trust among the Muslim Georgians are discussed in more detail in Part 2.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Perception of Threats

Respondents from Adjara, Tbilisi and Samegrelo were asked questions aimed to explore the perceptions of different threats. In addition to democracy and human rights, the questions are also focused on the perceptions of threats against Georgian traditions, orthodoxy, and “family purity.”

#### Threats against democracy

When asked whether democracy is under threat in Georgia, it appeared that the respondents in all three regions were inclined to believe that at present this threat is real. This opinion had the highest rate in Tbilisi (shared by a clear majority - 67.4%); In Adjara and Samegrelo this opinion was supported by an approximately equal number of the respondents (Adjara 47.5%, Samegrelo 43.9%).

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#### Threats against human rights

The survey shows similar data when it comes to whether or not human rights are currently under threat in Georgia. The highest rate of positive answers to this question was again in Tbilisi (71.5%), 55.4% in Adjara, and 46.5% in Samegrelo. Focus group participants explained the presence of the threat against democracy and human rights by their strong distrust towards Georgian political elites and state institutions. Most believed that strong governance is needed, albeit within democratic boundaries.

*“When there is no trust towards state institutions, there is a feeling of impunity. When there is a feeling that the law does not work, then we fear for democracy and human rights.”<sup>48</sup>*

48 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o man.

## Threats against Georgian traditions

To the question of how much Georgian traditions are under threat, the survey data are practically identical in Tbilisi and Adjara: 61.1% in Tbilisi and 60.7% in Adjara believe Georgian traditions are under threat. In Samegrelo this figure is lower, but still significant (51.3%).

When trying to identify the threats against Georgian traditions in the focus groups, participants' opinions divided. Middle-aged and older respondents were more likely to see the threat as losing traditions. In their view, the threat comes both from outside and inside the country. Radical conservative sentiments were more pronounced in the older age group. The respondents feel that their identity is being taken away and is no longer used as the foundation for education. This attitude was more pronounced in the answers of the respondents having a priest.

*"They attack us from all sides, especially from Europe and USA; they have a different mentality and traditions and want to impose their traditions on us."<sup>49</sup>*

There was another opinion, according to which traditions are not under threat from outside, but from inside the country, "because we have problems in the education system, families, etc."

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Young people viewed the issue differently as the vast majority said that they did not feel any such threats and substantiated their opinion by various arguments. Some referred to the "centuries-long history" of Georgia, where the society is sustainably preserving traditions. Others, more liberal, were in favor of getting rid of certain "outdated" traditions. They named the "qelekhi" (a Georgian traditional funeral meal in memory of a dead person after the burial) as the most frequent example.

## Threats against Orthodoxy

What was the respondents' opinion about whether or not Orthodoxy is currently under threat in Georgia? Most Tbilisi respondents were pessimistic, and 57.6% believe that Orthodoxy is currently under threat. In Adjara, however, most are convinced there is no threat (34.7%), while in Samegrelo opinions were divided, although many (48.4%) consider the threat to be real.

In the focus groups mainly those Christians who had a priest talked about the threat against Orthodoxy and believe that to overcome this threat Orthodox Christianity needs to be declared the state religion.

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49 Tbilisi, a 45+ y/o man.

## Threats against “family purity”

Similar perceived threats like those against Orthodoxy also persist when respondents were asked to reflect on the “fate” of “family purity” in Georgia. Almost half of Tbilisians (48.9%) think that such threat exists while it is a relatively weaker concern in other regions: Samegrelo 42.1%, Adjara 40.3%.

In focus groups they see the threat to the “family purity” as issues like the probable legalization of same-sex marriages, or having homosexuals in the neighborhood, or marrying followers of other religions who represent other “non-Georgian” cultures.

### **Findings:**

- ➡ In all three regions, there is an increased sense of threat against democracy, human rights, Georgian traditions, “family purity” and Orthodoxy. This perception is the most expressed is in Tbilisi.

## CHAPTER 5.

# State, Democracy and Authoritarianism, Political Participation and the Role of the Religion in Politics

48

The study surveyed our respondents' attitudes towards the government-society relations, democracy and authoritarianism, political participation, and involvement of the Church in politics. We used special techniques as a research tool: in Tbilisi, Adjara and Samegrelo selected respondents were provided with paired comparison statements from which they had to choose the statements that were closer to their stance.

### Government as a parent vs Government as a servant

The first pair of statements dealt with the relationship between the government and society, to measure paternalistic attitudes. The paternalistic statement that **"People are like children. The Government should care for them as a parent cares for the children"** was supported in all three regions. Tbilisi is less paternalistic than the others as just 30.5% agreed with this statement. In Adjara and Samegrelo more than a half of the respondents shared it (56.1% and 53.5%, respectively).

As for the second part of the statement, most respondents in **Tbilisi** (56.3%) believe that since the Government is chosen by the people: **"People should act as adults and control the government."** In Samegrelo this figure was 34.9%, in Adjara 32.5%.

### Findings:

- Paternalistic sentiments dominated in Samegrelo and Adjara.
- Individualistic sentiments were stronger in Tbilisi.

## Authoritarianism vs democracy

The second paired statements measured sentiments linked to authoritarian/democratic governance. The respondents were provided with two alternative statements: **“It would be better for the country if the elected political party makes all its decisions after consulting with the society”** and **“It will be better for the country to have a strong leader who will make the necessary decisions for society”**.

The respondents' opinions about the first statement, which describes democratic governance, were similar in almost all regions. Tbilisi had the most supporters of this provision - 73.9% (48.1% of them completely agree). In Samegrelo supporters were 64% (32.4% of them completely agreed), and in Adjara - 69.9% (31.5% of them completely agreed). As for the second statement about authoritarian rule, percentages over all three regions ranged from 20% to 27.4%.

Almost all respondents in the focus groups were against authoritarian rule; however some of them showed a positive attitude towards dictators, for example praising Stalin and acknowledging his “major achievements”. Another much smaller group found that nondemocratic governance was acceptable if it helped achieve stability, development and the restoration and preservation of territorial integrity.

49

*“Stalin used to kill people, but Georgian kings had been committing similar atrocities too - thereby we survived. Democracy does not work. It's important to set a goal and achieve it.”<sup>50</sup>*

*“We need a strong leader; I don't believe in democracy. We need a strong hand to put things right in our country.”<sup>51</sup>*

In almost all focus groups, young people especially (with minor exceptions), categorically did not share the aspirations for strong authoritarian rule.

*“If we want to have democracy, we do not need a strong hand.”<sup>52</sup>*

### Findings:

- ➡ The aspirations for authoritarian leaders are not predominant in all three regions, though still considerable. Samegrelo expressed the greatest demand for an authoritarian leader.

50 Tbilisi, a 25+ y/o man.

51 Tbilisi, a 25+ y/o woman.

52 Ibid.

- ➡ A small faction in focus groups was unequivocal about their aspirations for a dictatorial, authoritarian ruler.
- ➡ Some respondents openly expressed their sympathy towards the Dictator Stalin as a “great figure”.

## Assessing democracy as a system

The study also looked at the degree of respondents' acceptance of democracy. The majority in all three regions (especially Tbilisi and Samegrelo) believes that **“democracy is better than any other political system”** (Tbilisi - 67.9%; Samegrelo - 68.5%; Adjara - 58.2%). There was a significantly smaller number who thought that **“in some cases an undemocratic rule is better than a democratic one”**. Their number ranged from 14% to 20% in all three regions. Even fewer thought that **“for people like them, it does not matter what kind of government the country has”**.

## Interest towards current political processes

The respondents in all three regions rated their interest towards the current political processes in Georgia. The data analysis showed that these numbers vary in Tbilisi and the two other regions. In Tbilisi, the majority (57.4%) is interested in current political processes. In Adjara and Samegrelo the ratios of those interested in politics and those not interested are almost identical (in Adjara - 49.9% are interested, 49.2% are not interested; in Samegrelo 48.2% are interested, 49.9% are not interested).

Despite the low level of trust towards the state institutions, political parties, or journalists, focus group respondents stated that they monitored the political processes mostly through the media in order to “know what was happening in the country”.

### Findings:

- ➡ In Tbilisi people are more interested in the current political processes than in other regions.

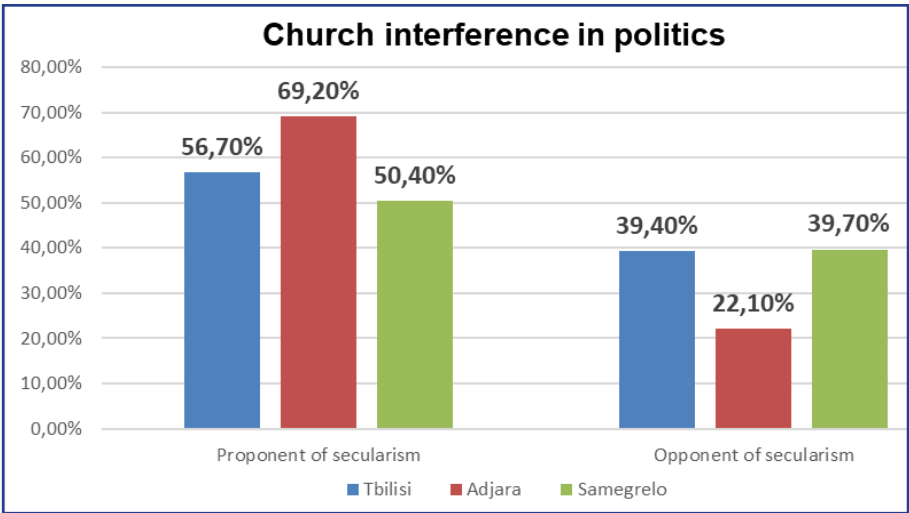
## The role of the religion in politics

The next set of paired statements dealt with the issue of the Church getting involved in political affairs, which measured the degree of acceptance of secularism by the respondents. The majority in all three regions (56.7% in Tbilisi, 69.2% in Adjara and 50.4% in Samegrelo) are in favor of secularism and believe that **“the Church should never intervene in political decision-making”**.

ing”. However, a significant part of the respondents does not agree with the idea of a secular state and believes that **“in the political decision-making process, the politicians should consider the Church's position”**. The largest number of the respondents who are in favor of this statement is observed in Samegrelo (39.7%) and Tbilisi (39.4%). In Adjara this figure is 22.1%.

Having/not having a priest was considered while determining the level of secularism. The trends are similar in all three regions. The respondents having a priest in all three regions support greater involvement of the Church in public affairs. Samegrelo is the most evident example, where the opinion that “the Church should never get involved in political decision-making” is more supported by the people not having a priest (52.7% of them) than by those having a priest, the latter make just 41.4% of the total number. As for the second opinion it is supported by 49.6% of those having a priest and 37.6% of those who do not (Figure 11).

Figure 11.



This question was the subject of serious debates in the focus groups. Opinions were radically divided. The respondents having a priest held strong anti-secular stance, while those who didn't have a priest, were against the Church's involvement in politics. Some respondents were clearly critical towards the Church hierarchy. Those counseled by the priests believed that the Government should listen to the Church's opinion especially in education matters. One without a priest expressed a critical opinion about the current intensive building of churches - *“Why do we need so many churches?”* Proponents of secularism argued

that the Church gets involved in politics, which they found unacceptable - *“How can the Church decide what should be written in the law?”*<sup>53</sup>

Some parishioners said that they either witnessed themselves or heard from others that some priests directly or indirectly “give political instructions to their flocks.” Some said this was unacceptable for them, and that their priests never did it.

Some respondents explained why in their opinion the government needs to “consult” with the Church when making decisions, saying that *“the parishioners are a powerful force and they more care for what the priest says than for the state.”*<sup>54</sup> They believe that’s why Government as to use all possible means, including the help of the Church. Many supporters of the Church’s active position said that it was necessary to declare Orthodox Christianity the state religion.

*“The government may not be able to influence these people so they have to do it via the Church.”*<sup>55</sup>

Some respondents associated themselves with the Orthodox Church, though they do not trust the clergy. They go to church to pray but don’t communicate with the clergy. *“My home is my church, I lost trust towards the clergy after they started building churches to turn them into their own businesses, but there are exceptions.”*<sup>56</sup> They think that currently the Government should not ask the Church’s opinion.

Some Muslims in Adjara noted with regret that Muslim youth are being converted to Christianity. They suspect this is done for security considerations, and believe that the state and the public associate security challenges with Muslims.

### **Findings:**

- Most of the population is in favor of secularism; however 40% in Tbilisi and Samegrelo believe that the government should take into account the position of the Church during decision-making.
- Respondents having a priest are more in favor of the Church’s involvement in politics.

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53 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o man.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Samegrelo, a woman.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Foreign Priorities and Support for Membership in International Institutions

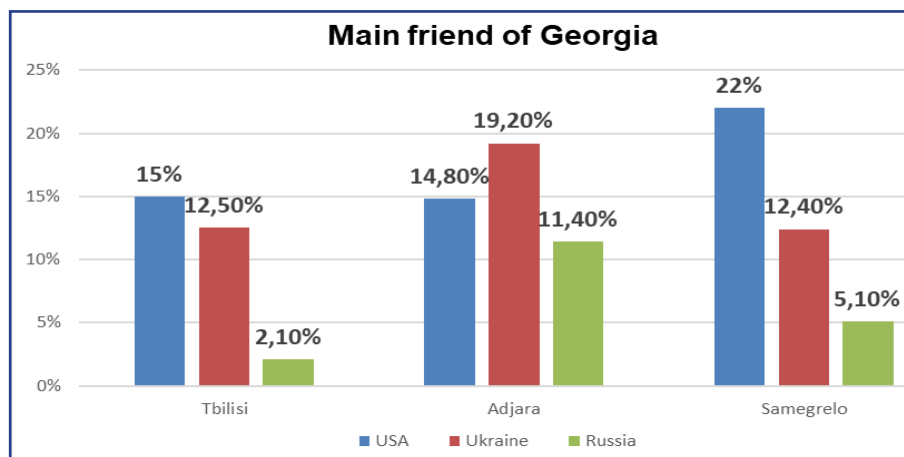
#### Main friend of Georgia

Respondents had to identify and position Georgia between the poles of “Main Friend-Main Enemy”.

When asked which country is currently Georgia's main friend, the highest rated in Tbilisi and Samegrelo were the **United States of America**: Tbilisi - 15%, Samegrelo - 22%, Adjara - 14.8%. However, 19.2% of the respondents in Adjara and 12.4% in Samegrelo named **Ukraine** as Georgia's main friend. In Tbilisi 12.5% of the respondents named Ukraine. Interestingly, in Adjara 11.4% of the respondents identified **Russia** as the main of Georgia, making this region significantly different from Tbilisi and Samegrelo (2.1% named Russia as a friend of Georgia in Tbilisi and 5.1% in Samegrelo) (**Figure 12**).

53

Figure 12.



According to the focus groups, the fact that Adjara is less anti-Russian may be related to the historic memory of being captured by the Ottoman Empire for centuries. Respondents in the focus groups also explained pro-Russianness of a certain part of Adjara residents by their deep connections starting from the Soviet times through the large number of mixed Russian-Georgian families. Also, starting with the Soviet epoch there was a serious presence of security services, like KGB, in this border region. According to some respondents, intensive Russian propaganda and the linguistic factor (better knowledge of the Russian compared to English as in other regions), and the recent escalation of the activities of ultra-conservative forces, contribute to this situation. Tourism also plays a role here, since tourists from Russia make up a significant segment of Adjara's economic success. In focus groups respondents were asked how they assess the general behavior of Russian tourists or the local attitudes towards them in the region, almost all respondents said that there is high acceptance of Russians, with some minor problems. They do not feel any threat or discomfort at the everyday level.

Some respondents named **NATO** as the main friend of the country, a rate especially high in Tbilisi (13.6%). In Adjara it is 7.1%, and in Samegrelo 0.2%. The answer to the open ended question was "**Europe**" for 2.8% in Tbilisi, and 7% in Samegrelo. (No such answer has been recorded in Adjara).

In each region, **a significant part of the respondents didn't know the answer to the question about the "Georgia's best friend"**: Tbilisi- 45.5%, Adjara - 32.8%, Samegrelo - 22.7%.

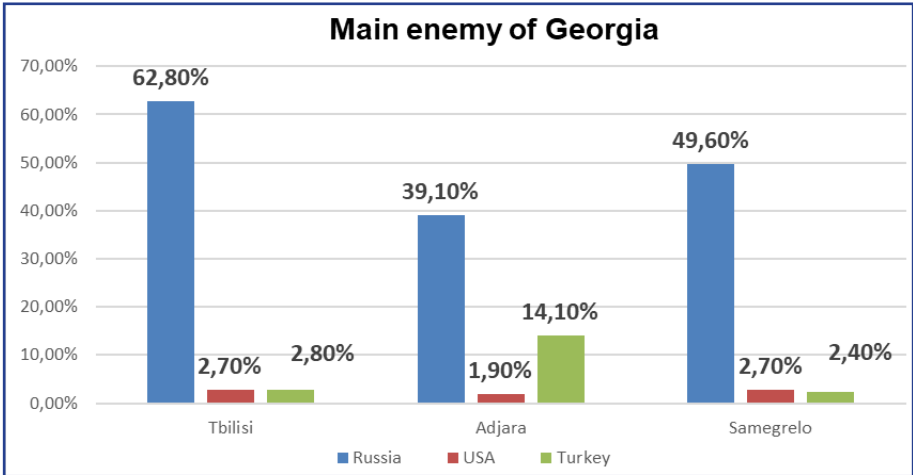
### **Findings:**

- The main friend of Georgia in Tbilisi and Samegrelo is thought to be the USA, while in Adjara it is Ukraine.
- In each region, a significant part of the respondents, and in Tbilisi, almost a half didn't know the answer to the question about who is Georgia's best friend.

### **Main enemy of Georgia**

Respondents also answered an open-ended question about which country is currently Georgia's worst enemy. **Russia** was perceived as the main enemy by the respondents in all three regions, albeit at different rates: 62.8% in Tbilisi, 49.6% in Samegrelo and 39.1% in Adjara (**Figure 13**).

**Figure 13.**



These differences were also distinct in the focus groups. Tbilisians did not shy away from directly naming Russia as the main enemy. The country was called an occupier, a historical enemy and the main adversary of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. A similar emphasis was made in other regions, albeit at a lower level and with some reservations. Along with Russia's hostility, they also explained why they had been disillusioned by the West. Some skeptics pointed out that after waiting for so long, they concluded that Georgia would not be allowed to become a member of either NATO or the EU. Another reason is that the West had only made declarations about Abkhazia, Samegrelo's neighbor, without action.

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*"When the Russians kicked us out from Abkhazia in the West they only expressed worry and concern."<sup>57</sup>*

There are different attitudes observed in Adjara, with some dualism - the Russian occupation is compared to the Turkish occupation. To contextualize the general situation, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, etc. were also named as enemies of Georgia. However, their percentages did not exceed 3%, and according to 1.4% of the respondents in Tbilisi, "all countries" are enemies of Georgia.

### **Findings:**

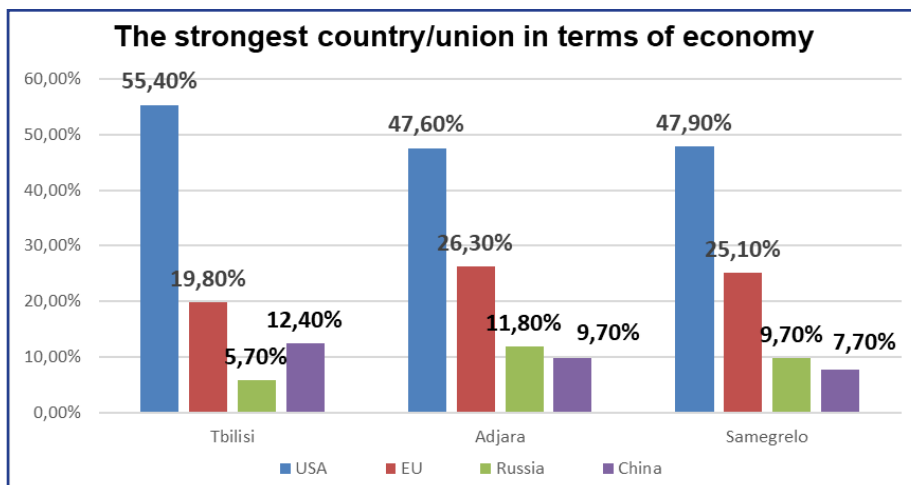
- ➡ Russia is perceived as the main enemy of Georgia in all three regions.

## The most powerful and attractive country

In the next section we discuss the respondents' perceptions of other countries' economic and military strength, as well as their attractiveness for educational purposes. The respondents were offered a list of countries and associations and asked to rate which of the following they think is **currently the strongest in economic terms**. Most of the people in all three regions support the opinion that the USA is the strongest country economically. **USA** was the most frequent answer (55.4%) in Tbilisi. In Adjara this figure was 47.6%, in Samegrelo 47.9%.

The EU also scores high. The **European Unions** scored: Tbilisi 19.8%, Adjara 26.3%, Samegrelo 25.1%; Both **China** and **Russia** scored considerable results in all three regions, although Russia's rate was low. For example, in Tbilisi it was only 5.7% (**Figure 14**).

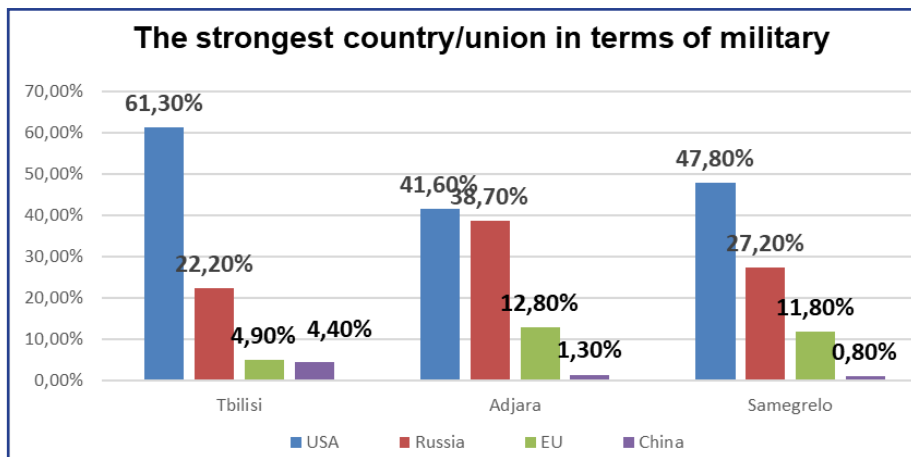
**Figure 14.**



When asked which is **the strongest military power the USA again leads in all three regions**. 61.3% support this in Tbilisi, 47.8% in Samegrelo and 41.6% in Adjara.

**Russia** was the top second in the list of the strongest military powers although there was a significant difference between the regions. Respondents in Adjara especially believe in Russian military strength (38.7%). The lowest rate was in Tbilisi - 22.2%, and in Samegrelo - 27.2% (**Figure 15**).

**Figure 15.**



Respondents in Adjara focus groups explained such closeness of perceptions of the US and Russian military strength primarily by a lack of information. Some respondents noted that there is a subjective attitude towards Russia, due to close economic ties, family bonds and efficient propaganda.

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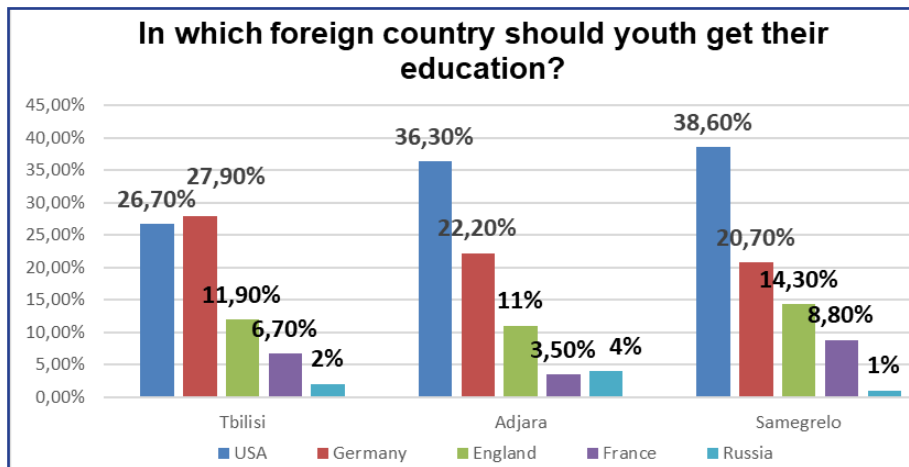
The respondents also expressed their views on different aspects related to receiving an education. In the first place they were asked where it would be better for Georgian young people to get a higher education - in Georgia or abroad. Most respondents in Tbilisi believe that young people should receive an education both in Georgia and abroad (46.1%). This rate is 35.7% in Adjara and 32.1% in Samegrelo. Getting education abroad has the lowest number of supporters in Samegrelo - 24.5%, in Tbilisi - 32%, and in Adjara this figure is the highest - 38%.

Those respondents who favor getting education abroad named a **specific country that is best for getting an education**. A significant number of respondents in all three regions named the USA as the country of preference: Samegrelo - 38.6%, Adjara - 36.3% and Tbilisi - 26.7%. In Tbilisi, Germany was slightly ahead of the USA (27.9%). It was named the top second country in Adjara (22.2%) and Samegrelo (20.7%) (**Figure 16**).

### **Findings:**

- Most respondents in all three regions share the view that USA is the most economically powerful country.
- From the military standpoint, the USA scored the highest in all three regions, Russia was the top second.

Figure 16.



- ➞ As for receiving education abroad, the population of all three regions gives preference to the USA and Germany. The latter leads in Tbilisi by a small margin.

## Attractiveness of markets

The respondents were asked, which are the most realistic markets for Georgian products exports - having to choose among the EU, Russia or Turkey. In Tbilisi 45.3% said that the **EU** countries are the most realistic markets for exporting Georgian products, and the **Russian** market was chosen by up to 21.7%.

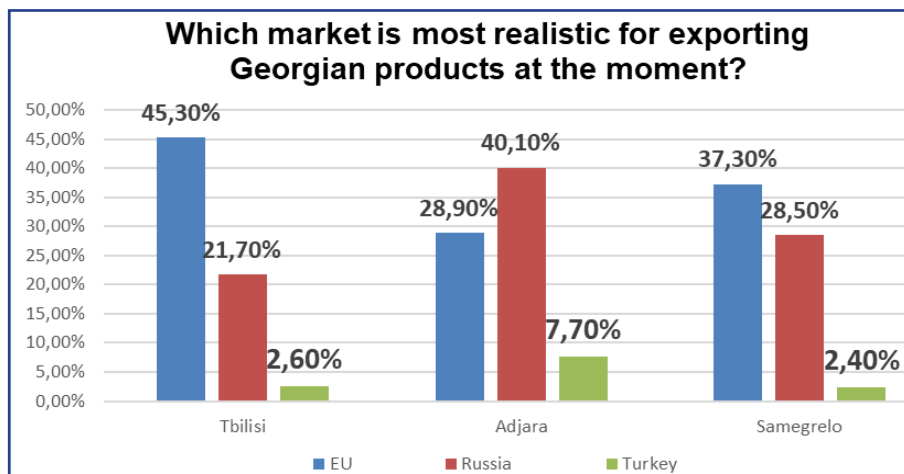
In Adjara, 40.1% gave preference to the Russian market as currently the most realistic for the export of Georgian products, while the EU is preferred by 28.9%. In Samegrelo 28.5% of the respondents chose the Russian market and 37.3% voted for the European Union.

Only a small part of the respondents (in all three regions) consider the **Turkish** market to be realistic for the export of Georgian products. In total, their share was 4.2%. The rate was highest in Adjara (7.7%) and lower in Tbilisi and Samegrelo (2.6% and 2.4%, respectively) (**Figure 17**).

### Findings:

- ➞ The EU market is considered as the most realistic in Tbilisi and Samegrelo.
- ➞ In Adjara the Russian market is considered the most realistic.

Figure 17.



## EU membership

The vast majority of the respondents in all three regions support Georgia's membership in the EU; 77.2% of respondents are in favor of this idea in Tbilisi, 77.5% in Samegrelo and 84.1% in Adjara.

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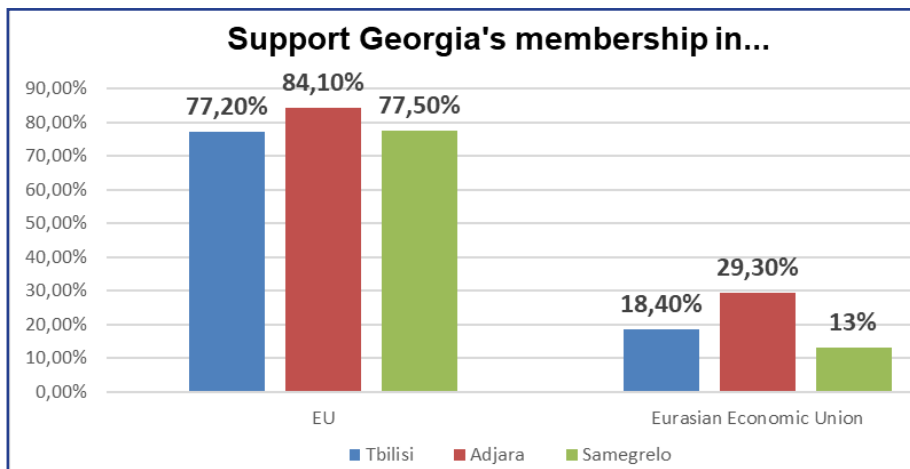
### Findings:

- ➡ Membership in the EU is supported by a large majority in all three regions.

## Membership in the Eurasian Economic Union

Unlike the European Union, the number of those respondents who support Georgia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, founded by the Russian Federation, is significantly lower. Most respondents in each region are against joining this alliance. However, the difference between the regions is thought-provoking: the Eurasian Economic Union in Adjara, compared to Tbilisi and Samegrelo, has the lowest number of opponents and the most supporters (29.3%, compared to 18.4% in Tbilisi and 13% in Samegrelo). At the same time, 65.1% of respondents in Tbilisi, 66.6% in Samegrelo and 52.3% in Adjara are against Georgia's membership in the Eurasian Union (**Figure 18**).

Figure 18.



### Findings:

- ➡ The majority in all three regions are against Georgia's membership in the Eurasian Union. Adjara has the most supporters for joining this organization founded by Russia.

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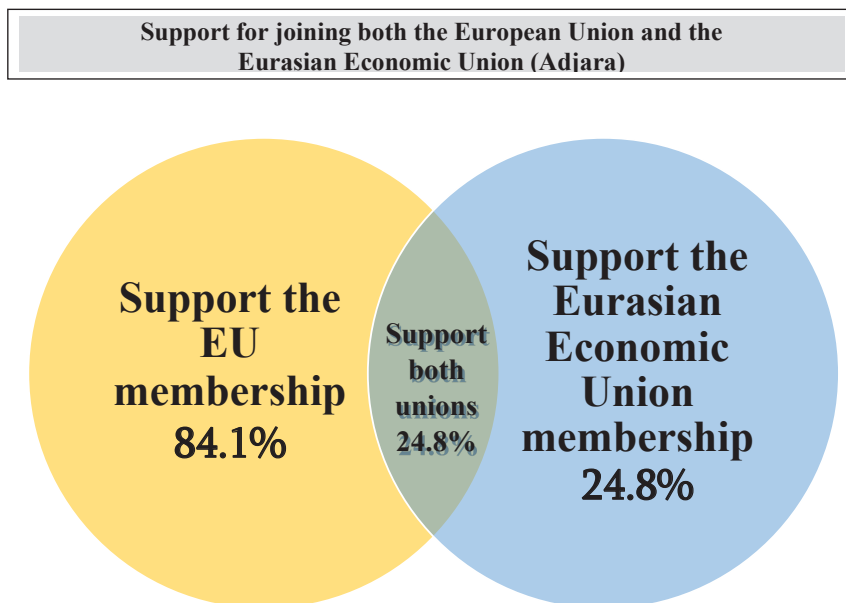
### Supporting both the EU and the Eurasian Union at the same time

Data analysis showed that a certain part of respondents support Georgia's membership in both of the (mutually exclusive) international institutions - the European Union and the Eurasian Union at the same time. In Tbilisi the percentage was 14.2%, in Samegrelo 7.2%, and the highest rate was recorded in Adjara - 24.8%. If we subtract these figures from the percentages of the supporters of the EU, it will turn out that in Tbilisi the percentage of the strong supporters of the EU is not 76.9%, but 62.7%; In Samegrelo not 77.6% but 70.4%, and in Adjara not 84% but 59.2% (**Figure 19**).

Some focus group participants explained this by the ignorance of some respondents, which also suggested that such dualism was more typical of the older generation of the people who feel nostalgic about the Soviet past.

*"They want to be dependent on others and would do anything for a quiet life, that's why they don't care which union we join, and support both."*<sup>58</sup>

Figure 19.



### Only membership in NATO

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Will **NATO membership only help Georgia ensure security**? Most respondents in all three regions feel positive about this (Tbilisi - 50.8%, Adjara - 54.6%, Samegrelo - 69.2%). However, our survey showed that in Adjara, and especially in Tbilisi, people are more cautious (or skeptical) than in Samegrelo: a significant number of Tbilisians and Adjaraans - 38.6% and 35.9% - disagree with the notion. Only 15.7% of the respondents in Samegrelo are skeptical (**Figure 20**).

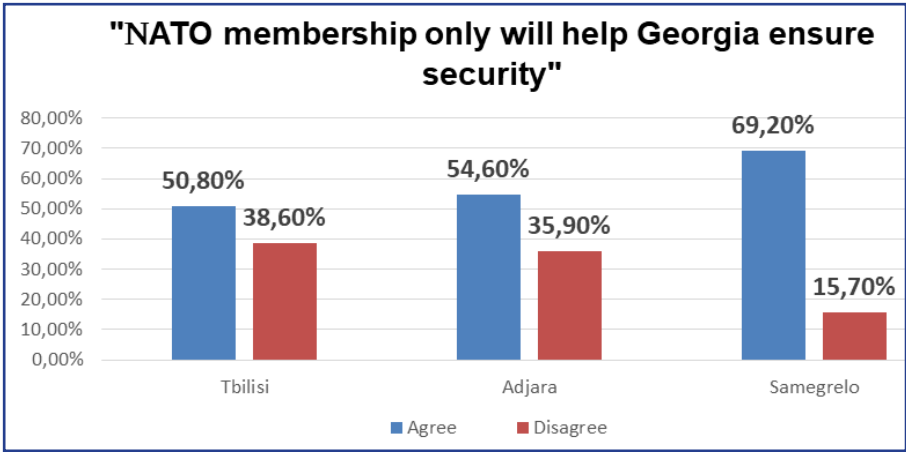
### Findings:

- ➡ In Adjara, and especially in Tbilisi, some people are cautious about the claim that only NATO membership is a guarantee of Georgia's security.

### The last hope

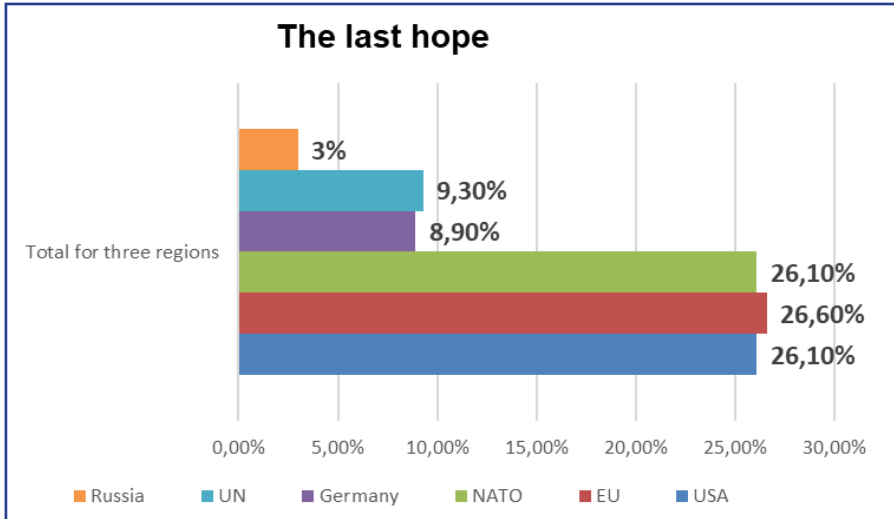
Respondents answered the summarizing question: **During a great hardship/ catastrophe (such as instance, full-scale warfare, natural disaster, etc.) which could threaten the very existence of Georgia, which country / international union can we rely on?** The responses varied by regions. For

Figure 20.



example, Tbilisi and Samegrelo have the highest hopes for the **US** (27.3% and 40%, respectively), and Adjara for the **EU** (31.7%). The share of those who rely on **NATO** is also high (Tbilisi 23.9%, Samegrelo 32.5%, and Adjara 27.2%). The EU leads in all three regions (26.6%), the US and NATO are slightly behind, as both scored 26.1%. The **UN** earned only 9.3% in total, while **Russia** had only 3%. **Germany** scored 8.9% overall (the highest rate was recorded in Tbilisi - 11%), and only 0.2% count on **Turkey** (Figure 21).

Figure 21.



## Findings:

- In all three regions, if a great hardship happens, they would rely on the European Union, the USA and NATO are slightly behind.
- During the times of existential threat Russia is being counted on by a small number of the respondents.

## The factor of having a priest

Notable facts were revealed during data analysis in the light of whether having or not having a priest as personal counselor affects a person's attitudes towards several issues, including foreign priorities.

Georgia's membership in the EU was supported by:

- **Tbilisi:** 77.9% of those who have a priest, and 78.8% of those who do not.
- **Adjara:** 81.4% of those who have a priest, and 84.1% of those who do not.
- **Samegrelo:** 74.6% of those who have a priest, and 79.1% of those who do not.

Georgia's membership in the Eurasian Union was supported by:

- **Tbilisi:** 13.4% of those who have a priest, and 20.1% of those who do not.
- **Adjara:** 28.9% of those who have a priest, and 30.3% of those who do not.
- **Samegrelo:** 8.2% of those who have a priest, sand 14.8% of those who do not.

Practically all data consistently pointed to the fact that respondents having a priest in all three regions are more skeptical about joining either the European Union or the Russian-led Eurasian Union. Isolationist sentiments prevail among the parishioners.

## What represents a threat to Georgian traditions?

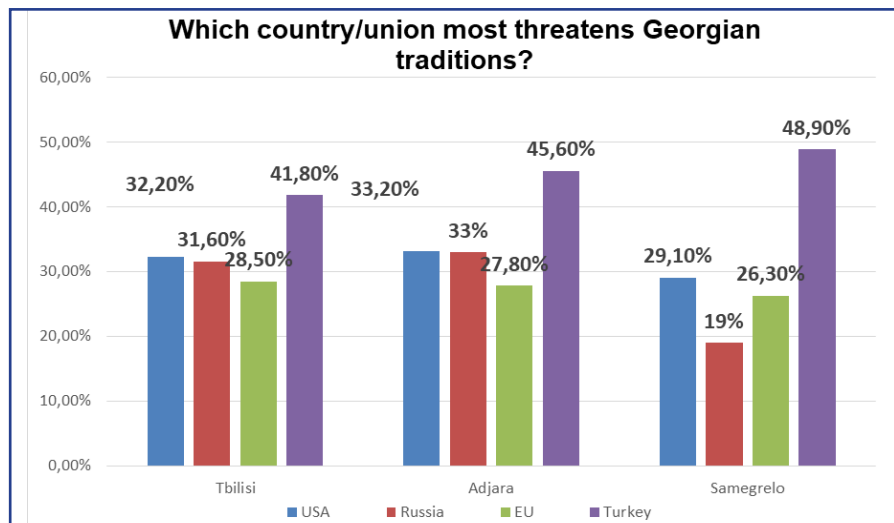
The analysis of the data showed that most our respondents in all three regions disagree (completely disagree, or somewhat disagree) with the opinion that **USA** represents a threat to Georgian traditions (Tbilisi - 60.4%; Adjara - 58.1%; Samegrelo - 56.3%). However, a significant number of the respondents acknowledge such a threat. In particular, in Tbilisi and Adjara these ratios constitute about a third (Tbilisi - 32.2%, Adjara - 33.2%), and in Samegrelo 29.1%.

The picture is more or less the same with regard to **Russia**. 31.6% in Tbilisi and 33% in Adjara expect a threat to Georgian traditions from the north, although it is noteworthy that only 19% in Samegrelo support this opinion. Overall, all three regions the total of 27.9% expect the threat to Georgian traditions from Russia, while the same figure with regard to the USA is 31.5%.

28.5% of the Tbilisi respondents expect a threat from the **EU**. This rate is 27.8% in Adjara and 26.3% in Samegrelo. The total rate of 27.5% is lower than that of the Russia and the United States.

The perception of such the threat from **Turkey** is much greater. However, the results of the survey here show significant regional differences: the majority in Tbilisi (58.2%) does not see such a threat. Opposite sentiments have been observed in Adjara and Samegrelo: the opinions of the respondents in Adjara are divided - one part (45.6%) agrees that there exists threat from Turkey, while the other (equal) part (45.7%) - does not. As for Samegrelo, about half (48.9%) believe that Turkey represents a threat to Georgian traditions, while 36.7% disagree. The total rate in all three regions is 43.1% (**Figure 22**).

**Figure 22.**



The picture was more or less the same in the focus groups. Here, too, participants largely disagreed that the United States, Russia, and the EU represent a threat. Yet there was a minority who shared a different opinion, mainly related to the notion these countries might try to expand their influence.

*"They attack us from all sides, especially from Europe and America; they have a different mentality and traditions and want to impose their traditions on us."*<sup>59</sup>

*"Russia poses a threat of physical destruction; the West brings spiritual destruction. When I think which is a lesser evil, I prefer Russia, because we will have to confront them physically anyway."*<sup>60</sup>

In the focus groups participants associated the threat to Georgian traditions coming from Turkey to the demographic expansion and attempts to propagate the Turkish language and culture. They also pointed to covert expansion of the Turkish ideology among the young Muslims under the guise of religious education. In addition, it was noted that Turkey is allocating funds to strengthen its influence in the region, using for this purpose the religious education in Turkey and the support of madrassas in Adjara along with other methods.

*"Turkey is paying you a state scholarship if you study theology. This is a part of Turkish propaganda."*<sup>61</sup>

*"You won't hear anyone speaking Georgian on Kutaisi Street in Batumi. You'll think you are in Turkey."*<sup>62</sup>

*"In Tbilisi the Marjanishvili (neighborhood) is like Istanbul."*<sup>63</sup>

*"They print books in Georgian. We have no idea what they teach in the so-called madrassas, we do not know about their programs. The Turks maintain contacts with the Georgia's Muslim Board."*<sup>64</sup>

We also measured the effect of a priest/imam on the following issue - what possible influence could they have on the perception of threats to Georgian traditions posed by different countries. Tbilisians largely disagree with the view that the USA is a threat to Georgian traditions. This attitude is distributed among the groups as follows: those who have a priest - 51%, those who do not - 63.6%.

- 
- 59 Samegrelo, a man.  
60 Tbilisi, 45+ y/o man.  
61 Adjara, a Christian woman.  
62 Ibid.  
63 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o woman.  
64 Adjara, a Christian man.

Most respondents in both Tbilisi and Adjara do not share the view that Russia poses a threat to Georgian traditions. A similar opinion was expressed by 57.4% of Tbilisians who have a priest and 63.9% of those who do not. In Adjara, 49.6% of those who have a priest/imam and 64.2% of those who do not, don't agree that Russia is a threat to Georgian traditions. Christians who do not share the view that Russia poses a threat to Georgian traditions: those who have a priest 59.3%, and those who do not have a priest 69.2%. Muslim Georgians with the same viewpoint: those who have an imam 54% and 50.9% of those who do not.

Adjarians largely disagree with the view that the EU poses a threat to Georgian traditions. Similarly, those who have a priest/imam - 64.8%, those who do not - 62.5%, illustrating that both Christians and Muslims think that the EU does not pose a threat to Georgian traditions. This position is shared by 66.1% of Christians who have a priest and 61.6% of those who do not. Among Muslim Georgians, the data are distributed as follows: 63.4% of those who have an Imam and 64.6% of those who do not disagree with the statement.

### **Findings:**

- Most people in all three regions think that the USA does not pose a threat to Georgian traditions, while a third disagree.
- More people in Samegrelo think that USA is a threat for Georgian traditions than those who think the same about Russia.
- Similarly to the USA, most people in all three regions do not think that the European Union is a threat to Georgian traditions, although about a quarter disagree.
- In Samegrelo and Adjara more people think that Turkey is a threat to Georgian traditions than those who disagree.
- In Samegrelo, almost every 2nd person sees a threat posed by Turkey to Georgian traditions.

# CHAPTER 7.

## Value Orientations



Based on the statistical data obtained by the survey, value orientations were created, based on sets of variables. The first and second indices reflect the levels of religion and economic status, respectively. Apart from the fact that these two indices have informational value in themselves, we used them to develop four others. These measure the attitudes of the respondents according to four value orientations: modernist/traditionalist, pro-Western/pro-Russian, liberal/anti-liberal and populist/anti-populist. However, the data revealed that a significant portion of those surveyed (the majority in some areas) did not have a rigidly established value orientation in one or several areas. To reflect this feature, we use the term “Undecided”, to denote respondents who were not aligned permanently with either tendency.

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### Religious Index

The religious index was distributed as follows:

- Non-religious - 35%
- Undecided/Occasionally practices religion - 35.9%
- Religious/Regularly practices religion - 29%.

### Economic Status Index

The Economic Status Index was distributed as follows:

- Economically vulnerable - 15.2%
- Economically less vulnerable - 12%
- Economically less non-vulnerable - 19.9%
- Economically non-vulnerable - 52.9%.

## Modernist vs. Traditionalist

According to this index, respondents were distributed in each region as follows (Table 7.1):

Table 7.1

		Tbilisi (%)	Adjara (%)			Samegrelo (%)
			All	Christian	Muslim	
1	Traditionalist	27.5	26.2	25.7	27.1	39.2
2	Undecided	53.8	53.4	52.7	54.7	48.2
3	Modernist	18.7	20.4	21.6	18.2	12.5

Correlation analysis showed a statistically reliable relationship between this index and religion, age, education, and economic status.

The correlation with **religion** was found to be statistically reliable in Adjara and Samegrelo regions (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2

Region		Value	Religion		
			Non-religious	Undecided	Religious
Adjara	Christian	Traditionalist	30.3%	18.8%	34.5%
		Undecided	54.6%	51.9%	51.2%
		Modernist	15.1%	29.3%	14.3%
	Muslim	Traditionalist	23.1%	12.7%	36.8%
		Undecided	59.0%	58.7%	50.0%
		Modernist	17.9%	28.6%	13.2%
Samegrelo		Traditionalist	37.7%	40.2%	41.7%
		Undecided	48.4%	47.1%	48.5%
		Modernist	13.8%	12.6%	9.8%

A statistically reliable correlation with **age** is only found in Tbilisi (Table 7.3).

**Table 7.3**

Region	Value	Age		
		18-34 y/o	35-54 y/o	55 y/o and over
Tbilisi	Traditionalist	19.7%	28.7%	35.8%
	Undecided	54.0%	55.5%	51.7%
	Modernist	26.3%	15.8%	12.5%

A statistically reliable correlation with **education** was noted only in Adjara (Table 7.4).

**Table 7.4**

Region	Value	Education	
		School/Professional	Higher
Adjara	Traditionalist	29.8%	20.6%
	Undecided	50.8%	57.1%
	Modernist	19.3%	22.3%

A statistically reliable correlation with the respondent's **economic status** was found in Adjara and Samegrelo (Table 7.5).

**Table 7.5**

Region	Value	Economic status			
		Non-vulnerable	Less non-vulnerable	Less vulnerable	Vulnerable
Adjara	Traditionalist	23.5%	20.1%	32.8%	44.7%
	Undecided	54.9%	55.0%	47.5%	47.4%
	Modernist	21.6%	24.8%	19.7%	7.9%
Samegrelo	Traditionalist	31.8%	42.5%	45.9%	41.8%
	Undecided	50.0%	49.6%	48.6%	45.9%
	Modernist	18.2%	7.9%	5.4%	12.3%

## Pro-Western vs. Pro-Russian

According to this index, respondents were distributed as follows (Table 7.6):

Table 7.6

	Value	Tbilisi (%)	Adjara (%)			Samegrelo (%)
			All	Christian	Muslim	
1	Pro-Western	67%	56.2%	51%	65.6%	69.9%
2	Undecided	28.8%	36.8%	40.2%	30.7%	24%
3	Pro-Russian	4.2%	7%	8.8%	3.7%	6.2%

Correlation analysis was carried out to find statistically reliable relationships between this index and age, education, economic status, and religion (Table 7.7).

Table 7.7

Region	Value	Age		
		18-34 y/o	35-54 y/o	55 y/o and over
Tbilisi	Pro-Western	75.5%	61.9%	63.3%
	Undecided	20.8%	33.8%	32.2%
	Pro-Russian	3.8%	4.3%	4.5%
Adjara	Pro-Western	59.3%	62.3%	44.0%
	Undecided	37.8%	32.3%	41.7%
	Pro-Russian	2.9%	5.4%	14.3%
Samegrelo	Pro-Western	79.7%	66.0%	66.5%
	Undecided	15.0%	29.2%	25.0%
	Pro-Russian	5.2%	4.7%	8.5%

A statistically reliable correlation with **education** was evident only in Samegrelo and Adjara (Table 7.8).

**Table 7.8**

Region	Value	Education	
		School and professional	Higher
Adjara	Pro-Western	47.4%	69.5%
	Undecided	44.9%	24.7%
	Pro-Russian	7.8%	5.9%
Samegrelo	Pro-Western	66.7%	78.5%
	Undecided	26%	17.7%
	Pro-Russian	7.2%	3.8%

A statistically reliable correlation with the respondent's **economic status** was found in Adjara and Samegrelo (Table 7.9).

**Table 7.9**

Region	Value	Economic status			
		Non-vulnerable	Less non-vulnerable	Less vulnerable	Vulnerable
Tbilisi	Pro-Western	70.1%	63.4%	59.1%	54.9%
	Undecided	26.5%	26.8%	40.9%	41.2%
	Pro-Russian	3.3%	9.8%	0.0%	3.9%
Samegrelo	Pro-Western	80.8%	74%	55.4%	60.7%
	Undecided	15.9%	22.8%	33.9%	29.7%
	Pro-Russian	3.3%	3.1%	10.7%	9.7%

The correlation of the index with **religion** is statistically reliable in Tbilisi and Samegrelo (Table 7.10). The most pro-Western sentiment in Tbilisi is among non-religious respondents, while in Samegrelo pro-Russian sentiments increase with the practice of religion.

**Table 7.10**

Region	Value	Religion		
		Non-religious	Undecided	Religious
Tbilisi	Pro-Western	71.1%	66.8%	64%
	Undecided	26.7%	26.5%	33.9%
	Pro-Russian	2.2%	6.6%	2.1%
Samegrelo	Pro-Western	70.2%	69.9%	70.7%
	Undecided	24.2%	25.4%	19.5%
	Pro-Russian	5.5%	4.6%	9.8%

**72 Liberal vs. Anti-liberal**

According to this index, respondents were distributed in each region as follows (see Table 7.11):

**Table 7.11**

	Value	Tbilisi (%)	Adjara (%)			Samegrelo (%)
			All	Christian	Muslim	
1	Liberal	13.8	9.9	9.2	10.7	11.4
2	Undecided	61.9	60.9	63.4	57.2	47.8
3	Anti-liberal	24.3	29.2	27.5	32.1	40.7

Correlation analysis showed that **men were found to be more anti-liberal compared to women** (Table 7.12).

**Table 7.12**

Region	Value	Sex	
		Women	Men
Tbilisi	Liberal	15.4%	11.5%
	Undecided	67.4%	54.4%
	Anti-liberal	17.2%	34.1%
Adjara	Liberal	10.3%	9.5%
	Undecided	64.7%	56.8%
	Anti-liberal	25.0%	33.7%
Samegrelo	Liberal	10.5%	12.5%
	Undecided	54.6%	39.9%
	Anti-liberal	34.9%	47.6%

In the Samegrelo region, the older generation (55 years and older) appear more anti-liberal than the middle (35-54) and younger (18-34) generations (Table 7.13).

**Table 7.13**

Region	Value	Age		
		18-34 y/o	35-54 y/o	55 y/o and over
Samegrelo	Liberal	14.2%	15.5%	6.0%
	Undecided	49.3%	48.1%	46.8%
	Anti-liberal	36.5%	36.4%	47.2%

# Populist vs. Anti-populist

According to this index, respondents were distributed in each region as follows (Table 7.14):

Table 7.14

	Value	Tbilisi (%)	Adjara (%)	Samegrelo (%)
1	Populist	62.7%	66.2%	75.0%
2	Undecided	21.9%	17.2%	15.4%
3	Anti-populist	15.4%	16.6%	9.7%

The correlation analysis revealed a statistically reliable correlation between this index and the **pro-Western/pro-Russian** index in Samegrelo. Pro-Russian respondents were more populist than undecided or pro-Westerners (Table 7.15).

Table 7.15

Region	Value	Value		
		Populist	Undecided	Anti-populist
Samegrelo	Pro-Russian	91.9%	2.7%	5.4%
	Undecided	71.5%	16.7%	11.7%
	Pro-Western	75%	15.4%	9.7%

## CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the population survey conducted in Tbilisi, Samegrelo and Adjara and data obtained by focus groups showed a dominance of pro-democracy and pro-Western sentiment in society on one hand, and the vulnerability to clear anti-liberal populist discourse on the other. The latter is anti-establishment and anti-immigrant in nature and also associated with pro-Russian sentiment. The study revealed similarities and differences between the regions as well as between different social groups.

In particular, nativist sentiments were high in all three regions, according to both the survey and the focus groups. Nativism, which is part of the populist triad<sup>65</sup> (along with authoritarianism and anti-establishment sentiment), has both an ethnocentric and ethno-religious character, where the latter component has a more pronounced and intolerant form. The impact of having a religious leader was shown and found as an important factor in religion, but also in shaping identity and many other attitudes, including foreign policy priorities. Belonging to a Christian or Muslim community in Adjara makes a critical difference in terms of attitudes towards foreign policy. The highest pro-Russian attitudes are observed among the Christian population of Adjara.

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Thus, according to the data, two of the three elements of the populist triad - anti-establishment and narcissistic attitudes - are highly evident in the target group. The vast majority of respondents are categorically against granting foreigners the right to purchase real estate in Georgia. The vast majority do not agree to grant them citizenship even if the foreigner meets all the necessary conditions for it.

A similar negative trend was observed in the study of anti-establishment sentiment - **trust in central state institutions is dramatically low**, while the church and the army are highly trusted. The focus group sessions revealed strong nihilism towards the political elite - both in the ruling and opposition spectrum.

As for the third component of the triad, authoritarianism, the results show a more comforting picture, in that only about a quarter of respondents crave for an “iron hand”.

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<sup>65</sup> Mudde, Cas, *Populist Political Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Value-oriented analysis showed that the proportion of populists on the **populist/anti-populist** scale is very high in all three regions. A strong correlation was found between populism and pro-Russian sentiment.

On the **liberal/anti-liberal** scale, the share of those with liberal values varies from 10% to 14% in the surveyed regions. The population of Tbilisi is the most liberal, and Samegrelo is the most anti-liberal. However, even in Tbilisi, the number of anti-liberals is almost twice that of liberals. The situation is even more extreme in the other two regions - the number of anti-liberals in Adjara is three times higher and in Samegrelo four times higher. However, the highest percentage of the population in all three regions pertains to the transitional category we call "Undecided". It is noteworthy that **women are distinguished by a much higher degree of liberalism than men.**

Undecided also dominate the **modernist/traditionalist** scale. In Tbilisi, traditionalists outnumber modernists by about 1.5 times and in Samegrelo by 3 times. The highest share of modernists is in Adjara, especially among the Christian population.

In addition, the data analysis shows that foreign policy priorities in the surveyed regions are directly related to anti-liberal views. In general, the more anti-liberal the inhabitants of a region is, the less pro-Western it is, and vice versa. Pro-Western sentiments are more common among youth, those with higher education, active users of social networks, and less religious people. At the same time, a statistically reliable correlation was found between economic status and foreign orientation - in general, the more vulnerable a person is economically, the less pro-Western they are, and vice versa.

An openly pro-Russian attitude was not popular among the surveyed audience and, conversely, there was a high level of favor towards Western countries and Western organizations. However, in-depth analysis revealed that pro-Western sentiment in a significant part of the target audience is fragile and undecided. The rate is particularly high among the economically vulnerable, less educated, middle-aged and older people. A significant percentage of respondents, for example, support Georgia's membership in two incompatible blocs at the same time - the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Although the surveyed populations see the United States as the key friend (with the exception of Adjara, where Ukraine is considered a greater key friend) and assume NATO membership as the biggest guarantee of security, it still sees more of a cultural threat in the US and EU than in Russia.

The survey revealed that there is a particularly high demand for a populist political force equipped with radical rhetoric on the right-conservative wing, and relatively less on the left wing. However, if the latter also allows left-wing slogans in its campaign, it could have a kind of synergistic effect and significantly increase its electoral appeal.

It is also possible that the demand for populist politics will push mainstream parties to episodic radical, anti-liberal steps or fundamentally shift their political agenda to the right. (In this regard, some manifestations have already been observed on both the governmental and opposition flanks).

The research data suggested that neither the existing political landscape nor the current political leaders will adequately respond to the demands of those studied, implying that there is a niche for a potentially populist political force.

Openly pro-Russian sentiment is still common in certain circles of society, although it does not have the potential for political domination at this stage. Although in the recent past pro-Russian sentiments were disguised as anti-Western rhetoric in public discourse, now they are distinctly anti-liberal: the pro-Russian discourse was transformed first into an anti-Western, and then an anti-liberal narrative.

Consequently, it is true that there is no threat of electoral success by any openly pro-Russian faction at this stage, but if such a faction disguises its political orientation with a distinctly anti-liberal, populist movement, and equips itself with strong nativist rhetoric, it has the potential to form a center of political attraction in the future.

## SECTION II: ANTI-LIBERAL ATTITUDES IN ADJARA

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Adjara was one of the target geographical areas in the study. Tendencies identified there were not only different from the overall picture received in other regions, but because of the diversity of religions in the region, Christian and Muslim, there were additional differences on a number of issues. These differences prompted us to dedicate a separate chapter to Adjara to provide a more in-depth description of attitudes, views and current tendencies among the population of the Autonomous Republic.

Compared to the other regions, Adjara stands out for its attitudes on foreign policy, and especially their favorable attitude towards Russia, particularly evident among the Christian population. Adjara was also unique in that it demonstrated the highest rate of trust towards Georgia's Central Governmental institutions, especially among the Muslim population. Another aspect was the widespread anti-Turkish sentiment that was strong both among Christians and Muslims, as opposed to certain stereotypical beliefs held elsewhere in Georgia.

In certain cases, similarities and differences between the two main religious groups were possibly influenced by priests and imams. Their role was evident not only in the religious sphere, but also with regard to the foreign policy issues, which was even more important in the context of the strong secular attitudes of the region's population, especially for Muslims.

Section II, dedicated to the Adjara region, follows the same structure and methodology as the main study, with several sections that review tendencies in domestic and foreign policy, as well as cultural, religious and value-based aspects.

# CHAPTER 1.

## Identity, Perception and Acceptance of other Ethnicities, Nationalities and Social Groups

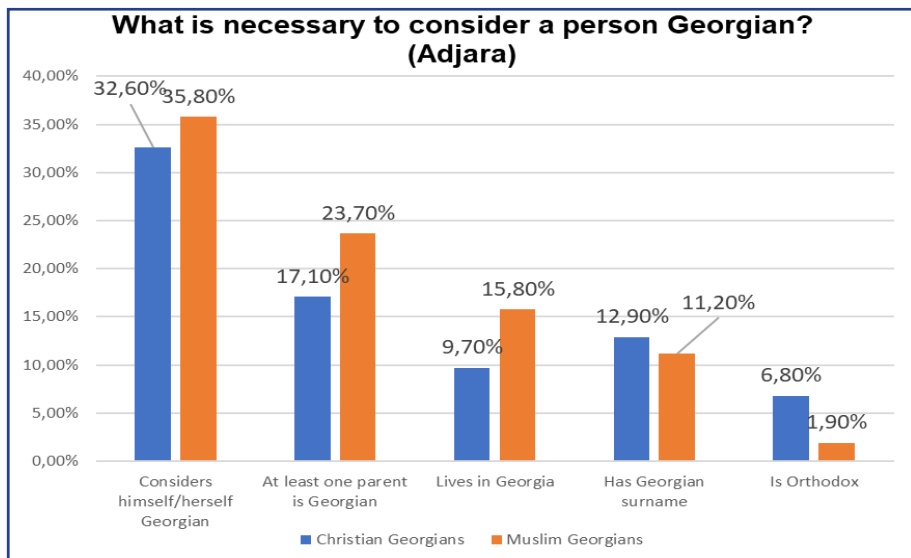
This chapter examines the respondents' attitudes towards both their own ethnic and religious group and towards other ethnicities / nationalities as well as social groups in the region.

### To be considered as a Georgian

The respondents were asked what was necessary for a person to be considered Georgian. Similarly to the other regions, mainly two types of answers to the above question were identified in Adjara: a) the person has to consider himself/herself a Georgian (33.4%) – that is, the self-identity factor, and b) at least one parent needs to be a Georgian (18.8%) – that is, a heredity factor. The study showed that both were important in Adjara, although preference was given to self-identification.

Notable findings in terms of religion include the fact that both Muslims and Christians agree that it was key for a person to consider himself/herself a Georgian. This opinion was slightly stronger among Muslims (35.8%) than Christians (32.6%). To a lesser extent, Muslim (23.7%), and Christian (17.1%) respondents believed that at least one parent should be a Georgian. Living in Georgia was a more important factor for Muslims (15.8%) for their identity, a view shared by only 9.7% of Christians. The Christian population of the region indicated that having a Georgian surname was a third factor (12.9%), which was important for a slightly smaller number of Muslims (11.2%). A factor that fundamentally differentiated Christian and Muslim populations was religion. While 6.8% of Christians considered that being an Orthodox Christian was important for being considered Georgian; only 1.9% of the Muslims think so (Figure 23).

**Figure 23.**



The religious factor of “being a Georgian” was also a subject of focus groups, when Muslims noted with chagrin that:

*“Being a Georgian is only identified with being an Orthodox Christian.”<sup>66</sup>*

*“You cannot be a full-fledged Georgian unless you are an Orthodox Christian.”<sup>67</sup>*

In this context, the data of the quantitative study were particularly important, and show that the Muslim population of Adjara has a high level of trust towards the Georgian Orthodox Church. Within the focus groups the Adjaran respondents discussed religious differences in the region with extreme delicacy. They underscored the very harmonious relationship between the Christian and the Muslim Georgians in the region. However, they pointed out that in spite of the generally tolerant attitude,

*“Sometimes certain issues become politicized and that is when problems arise.”<sup>68</sup>*

<sup>66</sup> Adjara, a Muslim man.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

*“When issues become politicized and when points are scored, for example concerning the construction of mosques, this hurts the Muslim community a lot.”*<sup>69</sup>

Some of the respondents did not rule out that the seemingly firm relationship between the two groups have the potential to escalate into a conflict. To this effect, they name “far-right forces” as a catalyst posing a certain threat in the context of Russian politics, since Orthodoxy was based on ethnic and confessional nationalism. Many of the Adjara Muslims think that

*“If these processes intensify, they will have certain negative outcomes.”*<sup>70</sup>

*“Most Muslims in Adjara had reconciled themselves to the dominant attitude of Christians, though this tendency has changed and now it is not so.”*<sup>71</sup>

*“The Church used to promote far-right views. The university in Khichauri is very dangerous and spreads xenophobic, anti-islamic sentiment, which in the long run will certainly produce results.”*<sup>72</sup>

*“The Muslim community in Adjara is based on civic principles. At the everyday level, there are very good relations between religious groups, however, the unconscious influences behind them that derive from the far-right and deep nationalistic narratives are very strong.”*<sup>73</sup>

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Focus groups also concentrated on the inadequate level of integration of Muslims, and their close ties with Turkey. Some outright islamophobic statements were made, too.

*“Local Muslims identify with Turks rather than Georgians. The culture of Muslim Adjarans is more oriented towards them. Back in the day what they referred to as “Georgia” was only the rest of Georgia, they did not imply Batumi. Besides too many Adjarans leave for Turkey for seasonal work.”*<sup>74</sup>

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69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Adjara, a Christian man.

*“A Muslim will never be fully Georgian due to their traditions and cultures. These are deep-rooted Muslims who were brainwashed in Turkey.”<sup>75</sup>*

## **Findings:**

- ➡ One third of the residents of Adjara (including from the religious perspective) feel they are Georgians, and self-identify as such, which is twice the number who believe the heredity factor is important. Muslims place a greater priority on this than Christians. Living in Georgia was another key indicator of being a Georgian for Muslims. Being an Orthodox Christian was key to being Georgian for the Christian group.

## **Religious rights of Muslim Georgians**

The study measured the degree of religious tolerance in the three regions, and found that Adjara was the most tolerant, as 70.3% of all those surveyed in Adjara supported the existence of mosques for Muslim Georgians and the opportunity to take part in religious rituals (22.8% of them “completely agree”). This statement was supported by 61.7% in Tbilisi (with 30% completely agreeing) and 26.8% (with only 3.4% completely agreeing) in Samegrelo.

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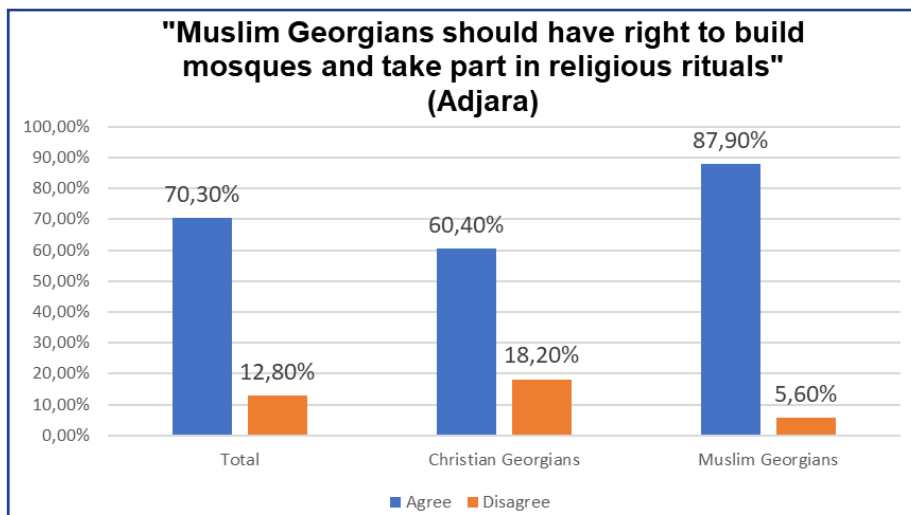
Compared to the other regions, in Adjara there was the least (12.8%) support of the alternative view that “construction of mosques for Muslim Georgians and conducting religious rituals hinder harmony among Georgians and their unification” (Tbilisi – 22.7%, Samegrelo – 38.3%).

In Adjara, most (60.4%) Christians consider that Muslim Georgians should be allowed to have mosques and to take part in the religious rituals; this view was supported by the vast majority of the Muslims (87.9%). Only 5.6% of Muslims think that construction of mosques for Muslim Georgians and their religious rites hinder harmony among Georgians and their unification, a view shared by 18.2% of Christians (**Figure 24**).

There were differing attitudes on this issue among the regions. Although most respondents in Samegrelo and Tbilisi state that “Christianity does not condemn other religions”, a negative attitude towards the issue of construction of mosques dominated.

In the focus groups, concern was expressed over the inadequate level of integration of Muslims, which was particularly important for Orthodox Christians

Figure 24.



as an important factor in considering a person a Georgian. In the focus group conducted in Tbilisi, the need to conduct a more active policy of “christianization” of Mountainous Adjara “that should serve the purpose of bringing or returning young Georgians into the fold of Christianity”<sup>76</sup> was emphasized. Muslim Georgians themselves noted the existence of such attitudes. *“A policy of proselytism was going on in Adjara where Muslim youth were chistianized. This was supported, based on security goals.”*<sup>77</sup> (An unspoken reference to state-level security concerns.) Indeed, in focus groups in all three regions, respondents frequently expressed rumors that there were possible anti-state religious studies taking place in madrasas (Islamic schools).

### **Findings:**

- ➡ Among the three regions, Adjara stands out for its highest level of tolerance, though the tolerance level is much stronger among the Muslims than among the Christians (a 30% difference).
- ➡ Compared to other regions, the rate of intolerance is the lowest, although, negative attitudes among Christians significantly exceeded those of Muslims.

<sup>76</sup> Tbilisi, a 45+ y/o woman.

<sup>77</sup> Adjara, a Muslim man.

## The feeling of pride/shame

In this stage of the survey, respondents expressed their opinions on several value-based questions.

- **Generally, to what extent were they proud or not proud of being Georgian?** Compared to Tbilisi (64%) and Samegrelo (64.3%), the feeling of pride was most prominent in the Adjara region (79.6%).
- **“Has it ever happened that you were ashamed of being Georgian?”** A vast majority of the respondents (84.4%) deny such an occasion, although a small percentage (12.1%) had “rarely had a feeling of shame” for being a Georgian.

An absolute majority of Muslim Georgians (92.1%) said they had never felt ashamed of being Georgian, with 6% responding “rarely” and 0.9% “often”. Most Christians (81.1%) have not been ashamed of being Georgian, however, overall 18.5% noted they have, rarely or often, felt this way.

### Findings:

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- ➡ The feeling of pride of being Georgian is most prominent in Adjara, where a clear majority of respondents are proud and have never been ashamed (especially Muslim Georgians).

## Preservation of traditions

**Who are the best at preserving their traditions - Jews, Christians, Muslims or other?** One-third of the population of Adjara (the biggest percentage in the three regions studied) note that adhering to tradition is **equally typical for the followers of all religions** (32.6%). They name **Jews** (20.6%) as most traditional, and **Muslims** (19.6%). **Christians** were adhering to tradition by an even smaller number of respondents in Adjara (16.3%), which was exceptionally significant as Christians comprise most the region’s population.

### Findings:

- ➡ Adherence to traditions in Adjara is seen as equally important for all religions, though adherents to tradition were listed in the following order: Jews, Muslims and Christians.

## Good Orthodox Christians

This section provides an evaluation of respondents on **how well each of the Orthodox Christians - Ukrainians, Greeks, Russians and Georgians - adhere to their religion.**

Among the three regions surveyed, respondents in Adjara were most reticent in their answers regarding **Ukrainians**. Only 42.8% thought that they are good Orthodox Christians, while in Tbilisi the rate was 51.1% and in Samegrelo it was 67.2%.

Compared to Muslims interviewed in Adjara, where 34.1% think that Ukrainians were good Orthodox Christians, the Christian respondents there view them as the model Orthodox Christians (49%). There were more negative answers among the Christian respondents (12.8%) as well, while only 2.8% of the Muslims share this attitude.

Other attitudes included “no” in Adjara: 8.3% (Tbilisi 6.1%, Samegrelo - 1.2%) and “I don’t know whether or not Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians / I don’t know” (Adjara - 48.8%, Tbilisi - 42.5%, Samegrelo - 31.2%). A higher rate was recorded among Muslim Georgians (63.1%) than among Christians (39%).

Similarly, **Greeks** were the least considered as good Orthodox Christians by Adjarans (46.2%) (Tbilisi - 55.1%, Samegrelo - 52.1%). Adjarans were the least likely to consider Greeks as bad Orthodox Christians (4.5%), but similar to Tbilisi (4.8%) with Samegrelo at 6.3%.

Attitudes within groups towards Greeks as model Orthodox Christians were 54.1% by Christians and 34.1% by Muslims, and a higher negative attitude by Georgian Orthodox Christians (5.8%), than by Muslims (2.8%).

Adjara registered the highest index of “I don’t know” as in “I don’t know whether or not Greeks are good Orthodox Christians”- 48.9% in total (Tbilisi - 39.9%, Samegrelo - 41.7%). In both types of questions, compared to Christians (39.5%), a much higher index was recorded among Muslims (63.1%).

Adjara stands out again when it comes to the lowest index of positive answers regarding **Russians** (47.8%) compared to other regions (Tbilisi - 49%, Samegrelo - 66.1%), while 16% of the interviewed population consider Russians as poor Orthodox Christians.

Attitudes about Russian Orthodox Christians varied, despite the fact that they were mostly positive among both Christians and Muslims within the region.

Compared to Muslims (36.3%), more Christians believed that Russians are good Orthodox Christians (54.8%). At the same time, the percentage of negative answers was also higher among Christian respondents (20.8%) or twice as high as among Muslims (10.2%).

In this case too, the “I don’t know” answer was highest in Adjara - 35.4% (Tbilisi - 33.8%, Samegrelo - 22%). This index was highly related to the results received from Muslim respondents, where 53% stated that they do not know whether or not Russians are good Orthodox Christians. This attitude was shared by less than half as many Christians (23.8%).

There was a different picture in Adjara regarding **Georgian Orthodox believers**. According to 76.5% of respondents, Georgians were considered good Orthodox Christians, while 12.2% did not think so.

Overall, the picture was similar in terms of religion: 78.5% of Christians and 76.1% of Muslims think that Georgians are good Orthodox Christians. Opposite attitudes were stronger among Christians (13.8%) than among Muslims (8.9%).

In this case the “I don’t know” attitude index (10.4%) was at least 3 times (and in some cases 4 and 5 times) lower than the result for other nationalities, though it was higher among Muslim respondents (14.6%) than among Christians (6.8%).

Similar to other targeted regions, most of the population in Adjara (91.9%) found that **good Orthodox Christians respect other religions** as well. Disagreeing respondents were minimal (3.9%), but still highest compared to other regions (Tbilisi - 1%, Samegrelo - 3.1%).

### **Findings:**

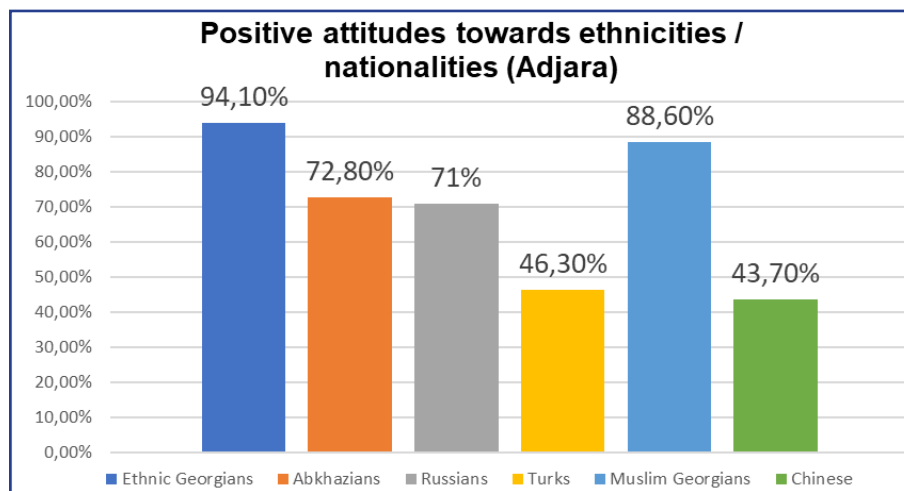
- Only Georgians are considered by Adjarans overall, as good Orthodox Christians and by both main religions of the region.
- Ukrainians, Greeks and Russians are considered as good Orthodox Christians by more or less the same number of respondents; positive attitudes are much more distinct among Christians, although their negative attitudes are equally distinct.
- Among Ukrainians, Greeks and Russians, the latter are considered as being better Orthodox Christians by Adjarans overall, but they are also seen as the worst Orthodox Christians, an attitude that is twice as strong among Christians as among Muslims.

- ➡ The negative evaluation of Russians is twice as high as that of Ukrainians and almost four times higher than for Greeks, thus Russians are considered bad Orthodox Christians by two to four times more than others.

## Assessment of ethnicities / nationalities

This part of the survey shows the attitude of respondents of the region towards the individuals of different nationalities, ethnicities and religions (**Figure 25**).

**Figure 25**



Ethnic **Georgians** were considered as good people by the absolute majority of the Adjara population (94.1%).

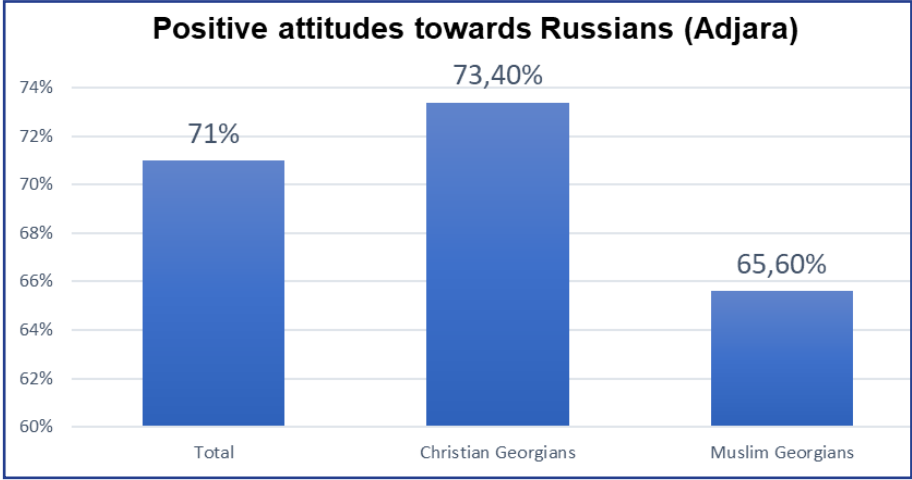
The highest index of positive attitude towards ethnic **Abkhazians** was recorded in the population of Adjara (72.8%), while in Tbilisi the number was 67.3% and in Samegrelo - 50.3%.

While it was true that vast majority of Christians interviewed in Adjara (71.8%) think that Abkhazians are good, Muslim Georgians living in this region have even more positive attitudes towards them (73.3%).

Adjara also led in terms of a positive attitudes towards **Russians**, with 71% of the interviewed population considering them good people, while in Tbilisi the same index was 64.1% and in Samegrelo - 51.3%.

Christians have a higher positive attitude towards Russians (73.4%) than Muslims (65.6%). Respondents with a negative attitude were more among Muslims (26.5%) than Christians (19.8%) (**Figure 26**).

**Figure 26.**



Within focus groups in Adjara respondents explained that a positive attitude towards Russians mostly derived from personal experience and most attitudes were formed from interaction with specific individuals. Soviet narratives were still strong among the older generation in Adjara, whereas linguistic, economic and family aspects were also salient (employees in travel agencies were more fluent in Russian and communicate with tourists in this language; there were many ethnically mixed families). Another important factor was the perception of the local population towards the non-aggressive attitude of Russians compared to the aggressive attitude of Turkish people towards them, which was a very sensitive issue for most Adjarans. This significantly affects the attitudes of Adjarans towards Russians and was reflected within focus groups:

*“A Russian tourist behaves politely, does not bother or insult you, is happy while communicating with you, and lets you know it. They treat you warmly. Some Adjarans have a wife and children in Russia.”<sup>78</sup>*

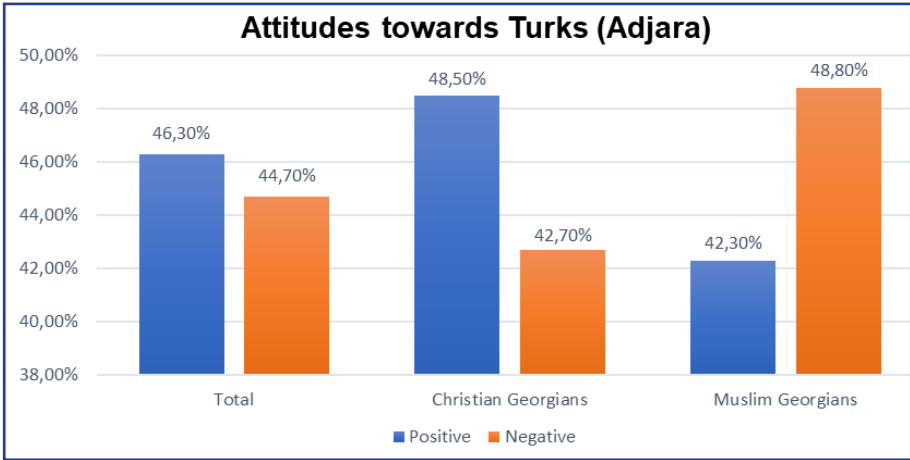
Respondents with a negative attitude towards Russians were mostly among those who opposed any foreign groups settling in their region in big numbers.

<sup>78</sup> Adjara, a Christian man.

Attitudes towards **Turkish** people in Adjara were divided: 46.3% considered them good, while almost the same number (44.7%) did not.

This contrasting attitude was recorded among Christians as well as among Muslims, although to a different extent. Almost half of the Christian respondents (48.5%) think that most Turks are good people, but those stating the opposite were almost as many (42.7%). As for Muslims, it is vice versa – positive attitudes (42.3%) were fewer than the negative (48.8%) (**Figure 27**).

**Figure 27.**



Respondents of a focus group linked the negative attitudes towards Turks mostly to their increasing presence in the region, the formation of population pockets and active economic activities. The perception that they are provocative and have imperialistic intents because they view Batumi as a part of Turkey, is deeply rooted. Respondents of the focus group gave the example of Kutaisi Street, which is “basically a mini-Turkey”, as a foreign, non-organic element for Batumi.

*“Even Georgians working at Kutaisi Street talk to other Georgians in Turkish. It is a miniature Turkey.”<sup>79</sup>*

However, tolerant attitudes were expressed, showing that some respondents think Turkish people bring diversity to the region and were positive for its economic development.

<sup>79</sup> Adjara, a 25- y/o Christian man.

*“Turkish streets make our city more attractive.”<sup>80</sup>*

*“I am not bothered by Turkish restaurants on Kutaisi Street at all. To the contrary, I like that street and often take my guests there.”<sup>81</sup>*

These respondents explained the aggressive attitude towards Turks as “growing Turkophobia in Adjara” and strengthen this statement with a number of arguments: a) anti-Turkish propaganda from some Georgian political powers trying to manipulate the expiration of the Treaty of Kars, as though it might provide the basis for Turkey’s territorial claims; b) the factor of religion, since Georgia was considered an Orthodox Christian state<sup>82</sup>; c) socio-economic factors because “rich Turks employing poor Georgians”<sup>83</sup> irritates the population of the region.

People sharing these viewpoints also emphasized that anti-Turkish attitudes were fed by radical political powers that organize demonstrations in Batumi, mobilizing youth using financial incentives to encourage them to publicly demonstrate against Turkish people. For some reason these radical groups do not target Russians, even though “there were many more Russians in Batumi, with more of them having received Georgian citizenship and possessing more real estate.”<sup>84</sup>

43.7% of Adjarans have a positive attitude towards most **Chinese**. While it was true that most Muslim Georgians living in Adjara (40.7%) consider most Chinese are good people, the index of negative attitudes towards them is also quite high (31.5%). Christians interviewed in Adjara have an even more positive attitude than Muslims did - 45.5% evaluate Chinese positively.

**Muslim Georgians**<sup>85</sup> received the highest positive evaluation in Adjara (88.6%), while in Tbilisi only 67.4% and in Samegrelo 38.4% of the interviewed population consider them good people. It should also be mentioned that 37.1% of the interviewed in Samegrelo and 17.9% in Tbilisi do not know whether or not Muslim Georgians are good people.

The absolute majority of Christians living in Adjara (87.1%) have a positive

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80 Adjara, a Christian woman.

81 Ibid.

82 Adjara, a 25- y/o Muslim man.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ethnic Georgians living in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara following Islam who were viewed as religious groups in this and other sections of the study.

attitude towards Muslim Georgians, however contradictory attitudes towards Muslim Georgians detected in focus groups, specifically among Christian respondents is worth mentioning. On one hand, they consider Muslim Georgians as part of their own culture, but on the other hand, they emphasize that one of the most important factors for determining Georgian nationality is faith. This attitude was mostly detected in Samegrelo.<sup>86</sup> Young people from Tbilisi mentioned that “they know some people who have Islamophobia and it impacts their approach towards Muslim Georgians as well.”<sup>87</sup>

## **Findings:**

- Adjara is the leader of the three regions to positively evaluate Abkhazians and Russians. Christians have a more positive attitude towards Russians, whereas Muslims have more positive attitudes towards Abkhazians, second only to representatives of their own community.
- Attitudes towards Turks and the Chinese in Adjara are almost the same. In both cases, positive and negative evaluations are divided almost equally. However, Christians have a more positive attitude towards these nationalities. Negative attitudes towards Turks are higher among Muslims than among Christians.
- Among the three regions, Adjara has the most positive attitude towards Muslim Georgians.

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## **The perception of ethnic groups' / nationalities' attitudes towards Georgia**

Following were opinions expressed by respondents from Adjara about what they perceived were the attitudes of different ethnicities / nationalities towards Georgia.

31.5% of Adjarans think that most **Turks** want good for Georgia, whereas 57.5% disagree with this statement.

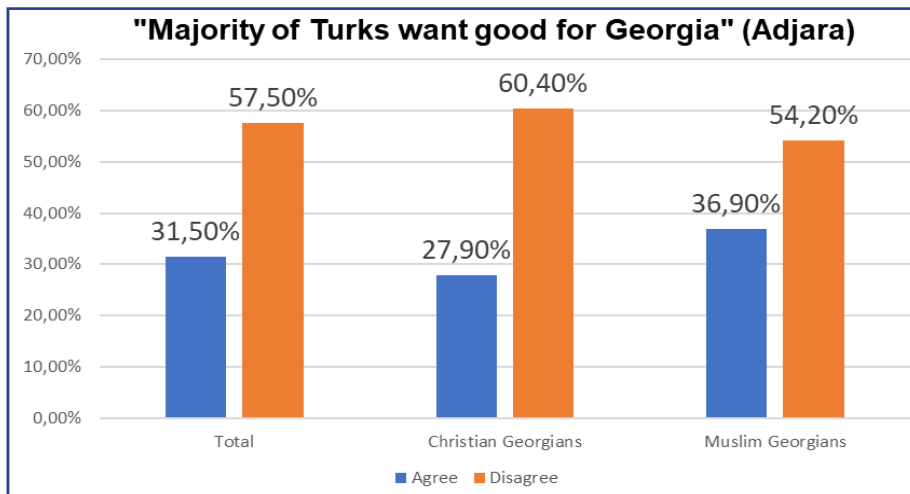
Both Christians and Muslims mostly believe that Turkish people's attitudes towards Georgia were negative. (27.9% of Christian respondents think most Turks want good for Georgia, while 60.4% did not think so). Muslim respondents think similarly: 36.9% believe Turks think positively of Georgia, while 54.2% did not think so (**Figure 28**).

Focus groups showed Georgians' perception of “aggressive behavior” by

86 Samegrelo, a man.

87 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o woman.

**Figure 28.**



Turks in the region, which they believe derives from Turkey's policies towards Georgia and potentially the issue of territorial claims on its part. In this context, they think that Turkey is no less dangerous than Russia.

92

*"Everyone says that Russia is an occupier, but you can feel that any Turk believes Adjara was taken away from them, and that Batumi belongs to Turkey and they will take it back."*<sup>88</sup>

*"There are a bunch of villages around Shuakhevi where Turkish propaganda is actively used. They have specific claims on Batumi."*<sup>89</sup>

*"Turks are provocative in Batumi, they have Turkish flags all over Kutaisi street."*<sup>90</sup>

*"You cannot hear Georgian conversation on Kutaisi Street, one may think that it is Turkey."*<sup>91</sup>

*"Turks bring their guides with them, who tell Turk tourists that Adjara was Turkey."*<sup>92</sup>

*"In Turkey, they teach children in school that Adjara is a part of their*

88 Adjara, a Christian man.

89 Ibid.

90 Adjara, a Christian woman.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

*country. Poor Georgians also go there for their higher education.*<sup>93</sup>

According to the attitudes of the respondents, the influence of Turkey is quite strong in Batumi, which was primarily associated with the strong economy and the construction of mosques. Such respondents state that the central government does not pay enough attention to the above issues.

*“Turkey is building mosques. Even the Government cannot stop them. They dominate in tourism as well, and most of the investments are also Turkish.”*<sup>94</sup>

Respondents believe Turkey allocates financial resources to reinforce its influence, and implements this policy partly through the provision of religious education for Georgians in Turkey and by supporting madrasas in Adjara. Some thought that radical Islamic movements had increased in recent times.

*“Turkey grants scholarships to those who study theology. This is a part of Turkish propaganda.”*<sup>95</sup>

*“They print books in Georgian. We have no idea what they teach in the so-called madrasas, we do not know the curricula. Turks have connections with the Administration of Muslims.”*<sup>96</sup>

*“There are too many madrasas. Turkey is trying to implement its policy by means of money and religion. You cannot hear a Georgian word in madrasas; they only speak Turkish or Arabic there.”*<sup>97</sup>

Muslim Georgian respondents presented counter-arguments, claiming that the viewpoint suggesting that youth studies in Georgia or abroad were directed against Georgian interests was wrong, since they are only taught a few religious rituals. Madrasas operating in Georgia were boarding schools and mostly serve the purpose of preparing students for Georgian national exams. As for receiving theological education abroad, it was linked with the fact that Muslims don't have the opportunity to receive a satisfactory theological education locally.

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93 Ibid.

94 Adjara, a Christian man.

95 Adjara, a Christian woman.

96 Ibid.

97 Adjara, a 25- y/o Christian man.

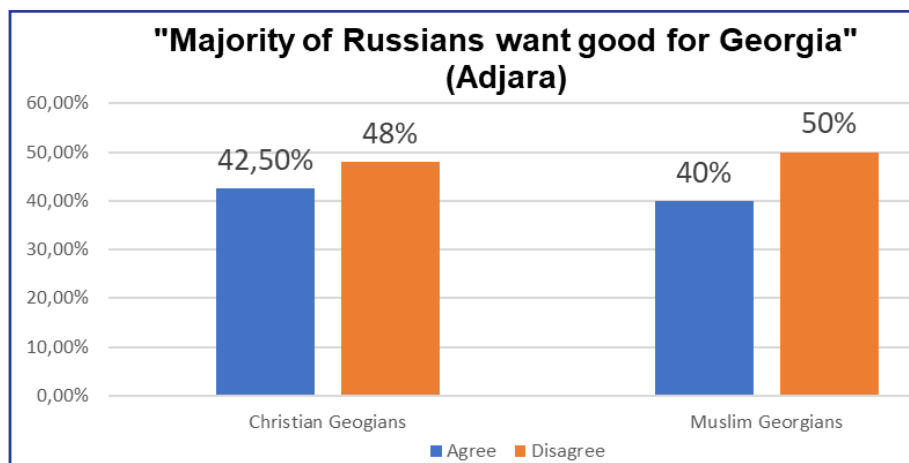
*"The main purpose of madrasas is to prepare students for national exams. In Khulo, there is a shortage of teachers, so children are unable to study and they are assigned to the above-mentioned colleges so that they can prepare for University entrance exams. Religious classes last for no more than two or three hours per week, and only on Saturdays and Sundays."*<sup>98</sup>

*"Madrasas exist due to necessity. If the state implements effective reforms in the system of general education, religious schools will disappear and there will not be a need for them anymore."*<sup>99</sup>

Adjarans stand out concerning their more positive opinions about whether most **Russians** want good for Georgia (42.3%), compared to Tbilisi (34.1%) and Samegrelo (30.1%). Nevertheless, more Adjarans (48.3%) did not believe in Russians' favorable attitudes towards Georgia, as was the case of the respondents from the other two target regions.

The perceptions were the same according to religion, as a comparably bigger segment of respondents (48% of Christians and 50% of Muslims) remain skeptical that Russians have a favorable attitude towards Georgia. However, more Christians believe Russians' attitudes were positive towards Georgia than the Muslims did (42.5% of Christians and 40% of Muslims) (**Figure 29**).

**Figure 29.**



Despite the fact that for the respondents of the region, Russia's attitude towards Georgia was associated with the occupation of Georgian territories by Russia, a large portion of them still underscore that it was important to differ-

<sup>98</sup> Adjara, a Muslim man.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

entiate Russian state policy from Russian people. Respondents sharing this viewpoint also think that most Russians were hostages of Putin's policies and that they were "drowning" in a flood of misinformation.

Respondents from Adjara agree the most (31.7%), as well as deny the least (42.4%) that most **Chinese** in China have a favorable attitude towards Georgia. In Tbilisi 29.3% of the respondents believed Chinese attitudes were positive, while in Samegrelo only 14.2% believe Chinese in general think positively towards Georgia. In Tbilisi 43.3% believe that Chinese have a negative opinion of Georgia, and 51.5% in Samegrelo believe this was the case.

### **Findings:**

- In Adjara (in total within the region as well as in terms of religion) most of those interviewed do not believe that Russians, Turks, or Chinese have a favorable attitude towards Georgia.
- Adjarans (in terms of religion as well) agree that Russians have the most favorable attitude.
- Adjarans (in terms of religion as well) are most sceptical about the attitude of most Turks towards Georgia.
- Adjarans evaluate the Chinese attitudes towards Georgia as being mainly negative, while it is still lower with Turks.

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The study revealed minor differences between Christians and Muslims when it comes to their evaluation of Turks and their attitude towards Georgia. Specifically, Muslim Georgians have a more negative attitude towards Turks than Christians, but the idea that Turks want bad for Georgia has more support among Christians rather than among Muslims.

Perceptions by Adjarans that Turks, Russians and Chinese harbor negative attitudes towards Georgia were significant, especially considering the overall positive attitude of the Adjarans towards most representatives of these nations. Consequently, there was a divisive attitude towards different people whose majority was considered good by the Adjarans interviewed, yet at the same time Adjarans question that their attitude was favorable towards Georgia.

In the case of Turks, research findings might be partially explained by Georgians' painful historical memory. However, if we follow this logic, results regarding the Chinese will be hard to explain because they have no historical links with the Adjaran population. This explanation seems unlikely also, given the generally positive attitude towards Russians even though Georgia is still engaged in an ongoing conflict with Russia, which is occupying significant Georgian territories.

It was clear that studying the attitudes of Adjarans towards certain nationalities showed how respondents were guided by personal experience, while evaluating the attitude of these peoples in the context of a state produced different results for the two statements. In the first case, most people were perceived as an individual, while in the second case, they were perceived as members of a particular state. For example, this can explain the fact that Russian people were viewed as good while Russia was viewed as an enemy.

### Creating a family with a person of another ethnicity / nationality / religion

The attitude of respondents about family composition, for example creating a family with Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Turks, Chinese, Muslim Georgians, and Abkhazians was evaluated to determine the acceptance of groups of various ethnicities, nationalities and religions. Respondents were proposed the following situation: **“Suppose you have a child who wants to create a family with a person of a different nationality/religion. Will you try to change this decision?”**

The survey shows that most respondents (60.9%) will not try to change their child's decision to create a family with a **German**. Christians were somewhat more tolerant in terms of their child marrying a German (68.8%) than Muslims were (57.6%).

Most Adjarans (59%) also have a positive attitude when it comes to creating a family with a **Russian**. Christians were more tolerant for marriage with a Russian, especially Orthodox, as 61.4% state they would not try to change their child's decision, and for Muslims, 52.6% had a positive opinion. However, 32.2% of Christians and 40% of Muslims would try to influence their child's decision about marrying a Russian. A quantitative study by focus groups in Adjara showed that mixed Georgian/Russian families have a long history in the region and that Adjarans still have close ties with Russians and Russia.

Slightly more respondents in Adjara (61.4%) have a positive attitude towards intermarriage with a **Ukrainian** and would not try to change their child's decision. In terms of religion, however, a similar tendency to the Russian case shows that 58.6% of Muslims and 67.8% of Christians would not try to change their child's decision to marry a Ukrainian.

Respondents' views change when it comes to marrying **Turks or Chinese**. As overall, only 40.3% of Adjarans see intermarriage with a Turk in a positive light, and just 38.7% for a Chinese. In both cases, negative responses were

similar: 53% would attempt to change the decision when it comes to marrying a Turk and 54.2% in the case of marrying a Chinese.

Muslim Georgians were more tolerant towards intermarriage with a **Turk**, although negative attitudes dominated for both Muslims and Christians: 42.3% of Muslim Georgians and 38.7% of Christian Georgians would not try to change their child's decision to marry a Turk. However, more - 49.3% of Muslims and 54.8% of Christians - would try to influence and change such a decision.

Concerning intermarriage with a **Chinese** person, both groups have similar positive and negative attitudes, with most opposing such marriage. For 38.4% of Christian Georgians and 37.7% of Muslim Georgians their child's marriage to a Chinese was seen positively. Negative opinions were stronger, however, with 54.5% of Christian respondents and 54% of Muslim respondents stating that they would attempt to change the decision.

58.2% of the respondents would not mind their child marrying an **Abkhazian** nor would they try to influence the decision, however, overall 31.9% were against marriage with an Abkhazian.

In terms of acceptable intermarriage, Christian respondents also evaluated **Muslim Georgians**. A large majority of Christians from the region (73%) would not try to change the child's decision.

Marriage with Muslim Georgians was viewed much more positively by Muslim Georgians themselves. The absolute majority (91.6%) states that they would not try to change the child's decision when it comes to marrying another Muslim Georgian. The percentage was much lower in the case of Christian respondents but still the majority (69.6%).

In Tbilisi, opinions were divided on intermarriage between Christians and Muslims: the opinions were very evenly divided (45.4% agree and 44.7% were against the intermarriage). In Samegrelo, negative attitudes dominate towards Christian/Muslim intermarriage, as 19.5% of respondents did not oppose such marriage while 74% did oppose it.

Attitudes by Christians towards marrying Muslim Georgians also differed within focus groups in Samegrelo and Tbilisi. Respondents were careful about expressing their views on the issue but there were some radical statements as well, by Christian respondents for whom religion was more relevant than other factors, including ethnicity, when it came to marriage.

*"I would not marry a Muslim, a Catholic nor someone of any other religion - only an Orthodox Christian."*<sup>100</sup>

*"I would not marry a woman of a different religion, no matter how much I love her, I still love God more."*<sup>101</sup>

*"I exclude the possibility of being married to a Muslim, although I would not mind if someone else chooses to do so."*<sup>102</sup>

## **Findings:**

- Marrying a Muslim Georgian is viewed most positively by Adjara respondents, although this attitude is much stronger among Muslims themselves than among Christians.
- Marrying a Muslim Georgian is most unacceptable for the Christian population interviewed in Samegrelo.
- Most Adjara respondents express more tolerance about intermarriage with Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Muslim Georgians and Abkhazians, but the level of acceptance falls dramatically when it comes to Turks and Chinese, where negative attitudes appear more often, and the tendency is maintained in terms of religion.
- In comparison with Christians, Muslims are more tolerant towards intermarriage with Turks although for Muslims it is still more acceptable to marry a Russian.

In the case of marriage, it was probably the religious factor that was determining, and Christians were more favored, rather than the Adjara internal context that implies the possibility of marrying Muslim Georgians. On the other hand, Adjara respondents obviously showed acceptance of marrying Muslim Georgians only but not representatives of other religions, nationalities or ethnic groups, which could be perceived as a form of ethnic nationalism.

## **Acceptance of foreign tourists**

The survey also measured the acceptance by respondents from Adjara of social groups such as foreign tourists. The absolute majority of those interviewed in Adjara (99%), similar to the other two regions, were positive about foreign tourists visiting the country. Only 0.5% indicated that they did not welcome foreign tourists. Russians and Turks were named among the tourists mentioned in a negative context.

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100 Samegrelo, a woman.

101 Samegrelo, a man.

102 Tbilisi, a 25- y/o woman.

## Findings:

- ➡ The absolute majority of respondents from Adjara welcome foreign tourists visiting the country.

## Occupation vs Tourism

This section sums up the tolerance of respondents from Adjara towards Russian tourists in the context of the occupation of Georgian territories by Russia. Similarly to other regions, a clear majority of the interviewed Adjaran population (86.4%, with 44.7% who fully agree) think that the **“occupation of Georgian territories by Russia is a matter of politics, which should not influence Russian tourism in Georgia”**. Of the three regions, Adjara had the lowest percentage (4.1%) who think that the **“occupation of Georgian territories by Russia should be the restricting factor for the free travel of Russian tourists in Georgia”** (Tbilisi - 7.2%, Samegrelo - 12.4%).

The results of the quantitative data confirmed this, despite the fact that all respondents recognized the occupation of Georgian territories by Russia. The majority also emphasized the necessity to differentiate Russian people from Russia's state policy.

99

## Findings:

- ➡ A vast majority of the Adjaran population view occupation of Georgia by Russia as a political issue that should not influence Russian tourism in Georgia.

## Attitudes towards foreigners who stay in Georgia for a long time

This part of the survey covers the attitude of Adjaran respondents towards foreigners staying in Georgia for more than three months.

In Adjara, up to 50% were neutral about **Turks** staying in Georgia for more than three months. Of the three regions, Adjaran attitudes were most positive and the most negative towards Turks: 16.3% positive (Tbilisi - 15.4%, Samegrelo - 11.7%), and 38.2% negative (Tbilisi - 29.7%, Samegrelo - 35.5%). More Muslims had a positive attitude towards Turks visiting Georgia (25.7%) than Christians did (10.9%). However, 51.0% of Christians and 32.2% of Muslims were neutral on the issue.

Concerning **Russian** visitors, similarly to the case of Turks, the percentage of neutral answers was high, but compared to the other regions it was the lowest. Unlike Tbilisi (59.4%) and Samegrelo (54.3%), the rate was 49.6% in Adjara, while 27.6% expressed a positive attitude. Respondents in Tbilisi and Samegrelo who were positive were fewer (Tbilisi - 18.8%, Samegrelo - 17.7%). Those with a negative attitude was 20.8%, which matches with the results from other regions.

Concerning visiting **Europeans**, 31.5% of Adjarans have a positive attitude towards them (28% in Tbilisi; 22.8% in Samegrelo), while 18.7% had a negative opinion and 48.1% were neutral.

**Findings:**

- Approximately half of the respondents from Adjara have a neutral attitude towards Turks, Russians and Europeans staying in Georgia for more than three months.
- Adjarans are most positive (throughout the region as well as in comparison with other regions) about Europeans visiting the country for more than three months, whereas most negative about Turks doing so (this attitude is stronger for Christians than for Muslims).
- Slightly more than 25% express a positive attitude towards Russians visiting the country for more than three months, which is the highest percentage of all three regions.

**Right to citizenship**

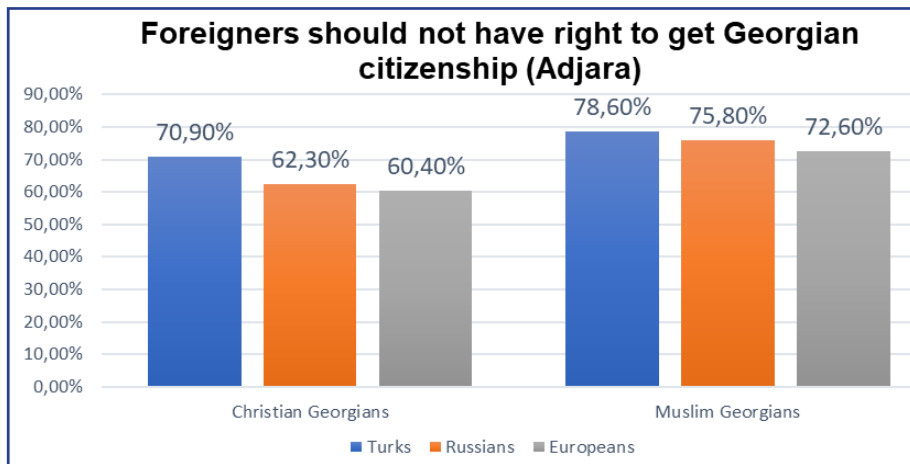
It was interesting for the purposes of the survey to determine the attitudes of Adjarans towards foreigners accessing Georgian citizenship (**Figure 30**).

The distinct majority of Adjarans (73.6%) were opposed to the idea that **Turks** should have the right to become Georgian citizens, even if they fulfill the relevant requirements, while 23% support the idea (70.9% of Christians and 78.6% of Muslims were opposed).

As for **Russians**, most Adjarans (67.2%) did not support the idea of granting them citizenship, while 29.7% were in favor (62.3% of Christians and 75.8% of Muslims were against, and 1/3 of Christians (33.8%) and 22.3% of Muslims were for).

In the case of **Europeans**, the situation differs from Turks and Russians, with 30.5% interviewed in Adjara support their right to citizenship, but still more

**Figure 30.**



than twice as many were against the idea - 64.7%. Specifically, 60.4% of Christians had a negative opinion and 34.9% were positive. Opposition was higher from Muslims (72.6%), with fewer supporters of the idea (22.8%).

Focus groups confirmed the generally negative attitudes towards foreigners receiving citizenship rights. For most Christian men the possibility was only acceptable for those who were “close to Georgian reality”<sup>103</sup>, which implies strict, complex criteria. Muslims were more tolerant and most supported only minimal restrictions. However, these respondents also warned that a “big influx of foreigners who would settle in the country poses an existential threat”<sup>104</sup>.

In this regard, women in Ajara were the most categorical. For them, granting citizenship to Turks was unacceptable, and linked to the increase of their population in the region, their compact settlements, intensive economic activity, and provocative behavior towards locals, especially women.

*“Turks have multiplied like grasshoppers, which irritates me.”<sup>105</sup>*

*“We passed along Kutaisi Street once and felt such glances from Turkish men that we do not want to go there anymore.”<sup>106</sup>*

103 Adjara, a Christian man.

104 Adjara, a Muslim man.

105 Adjara, a Christian woman.

106 Ibid.

*"Turks bother us in Batumi, and not only one street is the problem, but there are other streets as well. We should be able to walk in our streets. Even a glance from them is enough to feel insulted."*<sup>107</sup>

As for the youth of the region, most support the idea of granting citizenship to foreigners, although under various conditions (trial periods, quotas for specific countries, etc.). Some have preferences, for example, Georgians living abroad should be favored, with those from Western countries in second place.

In terms of granting citizenship rights, young people showed caution only towards Turks and Russians and it became evident that they feared these nations, especially Turks who settle in Georgia in large numbers, which might lead to their dominance. Also massive numbers of new citizens might upset the political and territorial balance and cause problems. In their opinion Turkey might even annex Adjara under the pretext of protecting its own (dual) citizens, just like Russia did it in 2008.

*"Turkey might suddenly declare that its (dual) citizens are being terrorized here which could result in an invasion of Adjara by its forces. Today there are 40,000 Turkish citizens in Adjara."*<sup>108</sup>

*"If it comes to Turkey annexing Batumi, Turks will support it."*<sup>109</sup>

*"Even today Turks think that Batumi belongs to them."*<sup>110</sup>

*"Sooner or later territorial issue might be brought up in the agenda."*<sup>111</sup>

*"I do not know what Turkey's policy is but most Turks have an imperialistic mindset. They think that if Adjara belonged to them for 300 years, it still belongs to them. I am not talking about every Turk, but this is how many of them think."*<sup>112</sup>

*"It seems like Turkish policy towards us is not quite visible, they do not deprive us of our lands like Russians do, it is the only neighbor with which we have a clear border but we should still be cautious."*<sup>113</sup>

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107 Ibid.

108 Adjara, a 25- y/o Christian man.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

## Findings:

- Although most respondents oppose foreigners receiving Georgian citizenship, this attitude is stronger among Muslims than among Christians.
- Adjarans have the most negative attitude towards Turks receiving Georgian citizenship and the most positive attitude towards Europeans.
- Adjarans (in terms of religion as well) have almost the same attitude towards Russians and Europeans receiving citizenship.

## The right to buy real estate

This section explores the attitudes of Adjarans towards allowing foreigners to buy real estate.

The distinct majority of respondents (75.6%) think that **Turks** who live in Georgia should not have the right to buy real estate. Indeed, the highest percentage who think that Turks should be allowed to buy real estate (22.3%) was recorded in the Adjara region (Tbilisi - 17.9%, Samegrelo - 11.4%).

Positions were similar towards **Russians**: the percentage of those who think that Russians should not have the right to buy real estate was 70.1% in Adjara, and only slightly higher in the other regions (Tbilisi - 74.3%, Samegrelo - 79.2%).

Adjaran respondents were more tolerant to the idea of allowing citizens of **European countries** to buy real estate, though only 30.3% of those interviewed agreed, the highest percentage of the three regions (Tbilisi - 23.3%, Samegrelo - 17%). In Adjara 63.2% of Christians and 74.4% of Muslims do not agree to allow Europeans to buy real estate in Georgia, while 33.9% of Christians and 23.3% of Muslims would allow it.

Focus groups in Adjara regarding this issue were interesting. Christian men tended to be the most tolerant by supporting simplified procedures. They explained this as being a necessity to encourage economic development and attract investment, and because of the large amount of land available.

*“These lands remain in Georgia. Currently, we are not using them and we are not letting others use them either, and they could be used more productively.”<sup>114</sup>*

Discussions showed that Christian men supported certain conditions for land ownership such as employing locals, using the land efficiently, renting the land for a trial period, etc.), in order to “protect the rights of the local population and state interests of Georgia.”<sup>115</sup>

Unlike men, however, anti-liberal attitudes prevailed among Christian women on this subject. Many emphasized the apparent increase in numbers of foreigners (especially Turks and Russians), making the need for strict state regulations on real estate acquisition.

*“There is a village near Batumi, called Ortabatumi, where apartments were massively sold to Turks and Iranians. There is a huge building where many foreigners can be seen. They do not know the language and do not have any connection with the Georgian culture. I live in a house with 30 Turkish and 30 Iranian neighbors.”*<sup>116</sup>

A more nuanced viewpoint was expressed in a mixed Christian-Muslim youth group who supported leasing out lands to foreigners to encourage economic development in the region. They were only cautious when it came to Russians and Turks buying real estate.

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Most Muslims expressed positive attitudes towards allowing foreigners to buy real estate. However, there were differences in their positions on the conditions of real estate ownership. The most tolerant approach was that there should be fewer restrictions on property purchases, “if we want to be a modern, open state and develop the economy”<sup>117</sup>. Many fewer Muslims expressed the opposite viewpoint, that urban land should not be sold to foreigners, because there was a threat that they would settle in large numbers. A moderate viewpoint was also expressed, that Georgian citizens should have the advantage when buying land plots.

All groups appeared to agree unanimously that Georgians living abroad should have the absolute right to buy land in Georgia, but not other nationals.

### **Findings:**

- ➔ Most of those interviewed are against granting foreigners the right to buy real estate. Despite this, in comparison with the other regions, Adjara is more tolerant. However, Adjarans especially oppose according

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115 Ibid.

116 Adjara, a Christian woman.

117 Adjara, a Muslim man.

Turks the opportunity to buy real estate, but would more readily accord the possibility to Europeans. Adjaran respondents' attitudes towards Russians acquiring real estate is similar to that for Europeans.

In Adjara, for all the three issues (being allowed to stay more than three months, acquiring citizenship and buying real estate), the most negative attitudes were expressed towards Turks and the most positive towards Europeans. For Russians, the general attitude towards residency was neutral, but dramatically became negative when it came to receiving citizenship and purchasing real estate.

## Career advancement opportunities in foreign private companies

This part of the survey evaluated the opinions of respondents from Adjara about the employment practices in foreign private companies operating in the region. Attitudes displayed among respondents were important in terms of identification of fears, as well as anti-Muslim, specifically anti-Turkish, but also nativist, anti-migration attitudes. This issue revealed how widespread the perception of discrimination was by companies operating with foreign capital and management.

Many Adjarans (43.7%) think that **private companies in their region prioritize Turks over Georgians for leading positions**, and only 29.9% think that **positions were staffed according to the qualifications and that ethnic background was not important**.

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Almost half of Muslim Adjarans (49.3%) agreed that private companies in the region prioritize Turks over Georgians for leading positions, while fewer Christian respondents agreed (39.9%). For the alternative opinion (above), more Muslims agreed or about one-third of the interviewed, whereas only one-fourth of Christians agreed.

The results of quantitative interviews were confirmed by focus groups. Although most respondents confirmed there was discrimination towards Georgians employed in foreign companies, this attitude was stronger among Muslim respondents.

Respondents of the Adjaran focus group focused mainly on practices of social inequality and ethnic discrimination in Turkish companies operating within the region. This was seen as a lack of opportunities for career advancement for Georgians, for example the requirement to have Turkish language skills, far smaller salaries compared to Turks, and fewer privileges than those granted to Turkish employees. This was seen as discriminating against Georgians,

and almost slave labor with miserable compensation packages. Respondents said that these issues intensify the already-tense relationship between Turks and Georgians. The employers would argue that these circumstances were due to the shortage of Georgian specialists with proper qualifications, hence the necessity to import personnel from abroad.

*“Usually, Georgians are not appointed to leading positions in private foreign companies, and if they are, they receive far smaller wages than foreigners working in the same position.”<sup>118</sup>*

*“I was working with a Turk on construction doing the same job as electricians, but unlike the Turk, I worked without breaks. He was paid 3000 GEL and I was only getting 800.”<sup>119</sup>*

*“Georgians are paid poorly. They are assigned to lower positions as laborers. Turks are paid better and they work as managers.”<sup>120</sup>*

*“Sometimes there is the requirement to know Turkish to be able to develop a career in Turkish companies, because top managers are Turks who do not know Georgian. It is often irritating to the local population because the state language is Georgian so it is not clear why one should learn the language of a different country.”<sup>121</sup>*

*“I had a similar case myself. A Turk was paid 10 times as much as I was, even though he was a worker just like me. Turks enjoyed other privileges, too.”<sup>122</sup>*

*“A Turk received 2000 Gel during the off-season and 2700 during the season, while I received 800 throughout the entire year when I got appointed in the same position. Housing and food were privileges for Turks. They ate better food, and separately from Georgians. It was the same for other positions too, Georgians were paid a tenth of a Turk’s salary. This is a widely spread opinion in the region.”<sup>123</sup>*

*“The salary of a Turkish worker was 1600 USD, while Georgian worker only received 600 GEL.”<sup>124</sup>*

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118 Adjara, a 25- y/o Christian man.

119 Ibid.

120 Adjara, a Christian woman.

121 Ibid.

122 Adjara, a Muslim man.

123 Adjara, a Christian man.

124 Ibid.

*“Turks look down on us. There are Turks working at the Batumi “Intourist” hotel. If you are a Georgian, you will not be promoted to a managerial position.”<sup>125</sup>*

*“They require knowledge of Turkish language in hotels as well as in other Turkish companies. Most Georgians do not know Turkish.”<sup>126</sup>*

Respondents do not relate similar situations in other foreign companies operating in the region, such as Russian companies.

*“Everybody has similar salaries, bonuses and compensations in Russian companies.”<sup>127</sup>*

### **Findings:**

- Many respondents confirm that Turks are prioritized for the leading positions of private companies operating in their region.
- Half of Muslim Georgians support this statement concerning Turkish hires, which is 10% higher than for Christians.
- Less than the one-third of respondents think that positions are staffed according to qualifications, and that ethnicity is irrelevant.

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### **An undesirable neighbor**

This section illustrates the attitudes of Adjarans towards **specific social groups, and those who would be the most undesirable neighbor for them**. In particular:

- 37.9% do not want a criminal as neighbor.
- 31.8% do not want a drug addict as neighbor.
- 24.2% do not want a homosexual as neighbor.

These three social profiles seen to be undesirable as neighbors in Adjara coincide with those in the other two regions.

### **Findings:**

- Undesirable neighbors in Adjara are named in the following sequence – criminals, drug-addicts and homosexuals.

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125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Perception of Threats



This section reveals opinions expressed by Adjara respondents about the threats to democracy, human rights, Georgian traditions, Orthodoxy, and “family purity” in Georgia.

#### Threats against democracy

Similarly to the other two regions, a significant percentage of Adjara respondents think that currently democracy is under threat in Georgia, with 47.5% sharing this opinion, 64.6% of Christian Georgians and 45.3% of Muslim Georgians.

#### Threats against human rights

Threats to human rights in Georgia were perceived by 55.4% of the Adjara population, with 64.8% of Christians believing it was true. However positions were divided among Muslims, with 50.5% who believed this, but 49.5% did not think so.

#### Threats against Georgian traditions

Only 60.7% of the interviewed think that threats to Georgian traditions are real, which is quite close to the results in Tbilisi, which showed the highest percentage of the three regions.

#### Threats against Orthodoxy

Most Adjara respondents (55.3%) were confident that currently Orthodoxy is not under threat in Georgia. This was the highest rate among the surveyed regions (Tbilisi - 34.7%, Samegrelo - 48.4%). However 33.9% of respondents did think that Orthodox Christianity is currently under threat. In the focus groups conducted in Adjara, most respondents who have a priest indicated that Orthodoxy is

under threat. One young member of the focus group conducted with Christian women expressed the concern that she is experiencing a discriminatory attitude from her peers because she is a believer, as her peers make sarcastic comments which often go beyond ethical norms.

*“Orthodoxy is no longer fashionable for young people. A person who goes to church and fasts is an object of mockery and is bullied by peers.”* <sup>128</sup>

## Threats against “family purity”

In Adjara, 55.3% believe in the “family purity”, which was the highest rate compared to other regions (Samegrelo - 48.7%, Tbilisi - 42.8%). Threats were perceived the least of the three regions (40.3%), while in Tbilisi the rate was 48.9% and in Samegrelo it was 42.1%.

### **Findings:**

- ➔ In Adjara, the perception of threat is the strongest concerning Georgian traditions.
- ➔ Perceived threats are weakest, in comparison with the other regions, to Orthodoxy.
- ➔ Generally, perceived threats are stronger for Christians than for Muslims in Adjara. Muslims perceive more threats to human rights, although the percentage of those who did not perceive this threat is almost equal.

## CHAPTER 3.

### State, Democracy and Authoritarianism, Political Participation and the Role of the Religion in Politics

Respondents from the Adjara region expressed their perceptions about the attitude of the government towards society, active strategies of the dominant political power in the country and other issues.

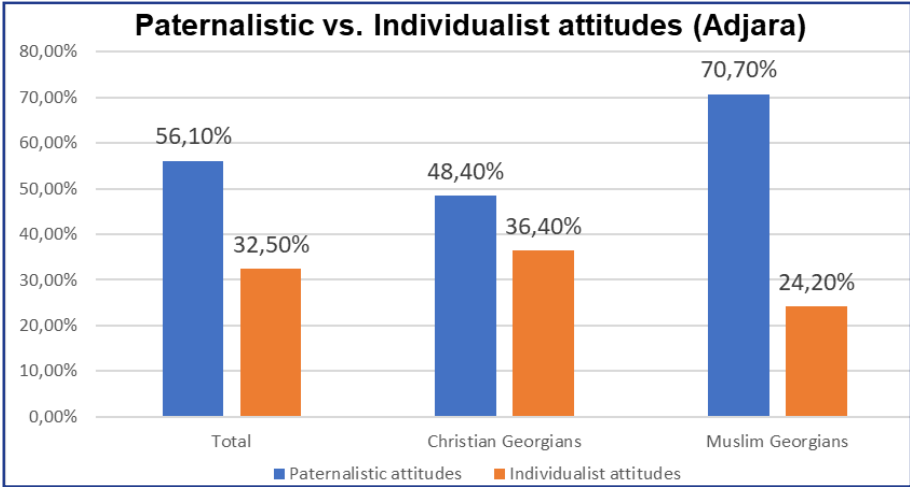
#### Government as a parent vs Government as a servant

Paternal attitudes were strongest in Adjara of the three areas studied, as 56.1% of the respondents think that **people are like children and the government should take care of them, “just like a parent cares for the children”** (30.5% believe this in Tbilisi, and 53.5% in Samegrelo). The index of those who “completely agree” with this statement was high in Adjara, with 21.2% of the interviewed population fully sharing this viewpoint.

Far fewer respondents of the region (32.5%) think that since **the government was elected by the people, people should act as adults and control the government**. This opinion was shared by far fewer in Adjara than in either Tbilisi (56.3%) or Samegrelo (34.9%).

Paternal attitudes were much stronger in Muslims than in Christians: 48.4% of Christians think that the government should take care of people, while the distinct majority of Muslims (70.7%) supported this viewpoint. The second viewpoint, that people should be controlling the government, was supported by 24.2% of Muslims and 36.4% of Christians (**Figure 31**).

Figure 31.



**Findings:**

- Paternal attitudes are dominant, whereas individualist attitudes are the weakest in Adjara (within the region as well as in comparison with the other regions).
- Paternal attitudes are much stronger in Muslims than in Christians.

111

**Authoritarianism vs democracy**

Most (69.9%) respondents in Adjara supported a democratic government and the statement that **“it would be better for the country if the elected political party makes all its decisions after consulting with society”**. Only 31.5% completely agreed with this, however, which was the lowest percentage, compared to the other regions (Tbilisi - 48.1%, Samegrelo - 32.4%). An authoritarian government was supported by only 24.5% however, illustrated by the statement that **“it would be better for the country to have a strong leader who will make the necessary decisions for the society”**, and only 13.1% completely agreed.

Both the majority of Christians (71.5%) as well as Muslims (69.2%) support democratic government. Attitudes towards the authoritarian government (the second viewpoint above) were also similar in both groups (Christians - 25.2%, Muslims - 24.3%).

Opinions expressed in focus groups varied widely. The vast majority of par-

ticipants desired strong national leadership, though opinions differed on how democratic a leader should be. On one hand, the unacceptability of dictatorial and authoritarian government was raised, but on the other hand the attitudes of respondents indicated they were ready to support a strong, charismatic person, if such a leader appears.

### **Findings:**

- Most Adjarans (including both faiths) support democratic government, although considerable part of the surveyed population favours an authoritarian government.

## **Evaluating democracy as a system**

Most Adjara respondents (58.2%) think that “**democracy is better than any other political system**” (Tbilisi - 67.9%, Samegrelo - 68.5%). The percentage of respondents who think that “**in some cases an undemocratic rule is better than a democratic one**” was substantially lower, or only 19.3% in Adjara (18.9% in Tbilisi and 14.4% in Samegrelo). The percentage of those who think that “**for people like them it does not matter what kind of government the country has**” was even smaller (14.1%), although it is twice as much as the rates of the other regions (Tbilisi - 6.3%, Samegrelo - 7%).

### **Findings:**

- The percentage of respondents who admit the need for a non-democratic government or have a nihilistic attitude towards the form of governance is substantially low but at the same time higher than in the other regions.

## **Interest towards current political processes**

Respondents of the region also rated their interest towards the ongoing political processes in Georgia. The percentage of those who said they were interested or not interested in politics was almost equal in Adjara (interested - 49.9%, not interested - 49.2%).

Focus groups showed that Adjarans receive most of their information about the current events from the media. The opinions of non-governmental organizations were also important to them, although they trust both journalists and individual NGOs “selectively”.

## Findings:

- ➡ In Adjara the percentages of those interested and not interested in the current political processes is approximately equal.

## The role of religion in politics

Most (69.2%) respondents interviewed in Adjara support secularism, and consider that the **“Church should never intervene in political decision-making”**. Of all three regions, Adjara had the largest percentage of respondents supporting this statement (Tbilisi – 56.7% Samegrelo – 50.4%). A small percentage (22.1% - the smallest of the regions studied) opposed the idea of a secular state and believe that **“in the political decision-making process, the politicians should consider the Church’s position”**. In Tbilisi this number was 39.4% and in Samegrelo, 39.7%. Muslim respondents agreed with a secular policy most (78.1%) and Christians by a large majority (63.6%). Concerning whether politicians should consider the Church’s position, only 13% of Muslims and 28.4% of Christians agreed.

Three main points of view were identified during the focus groups in Adjara. One group believed that Church’s intervention in policy-making process was absolutely unacceptable since Georgia was a secular state. A second group appeared advocate for “good neighborly relations” between Government and Church, and regretted that relations were not better.

*“It is important for various institutions to find a common language, though the situation has shown that there is no such sensitivity between the Government and the Patriarchate.”<sup>129</sup>*

Women in Adjara having priests were particularly supportive of this view. They believed in the necessity of “consulting” by the Government with the Church when making a decision, because the latter was a “great power” and parishioners were more interested in what the priest would say rather than what the state would say”.<sup>130</sup> Yet they also agreed that “democratic governance implied considering everybody’s opinions”.<sup>131</sup>

A third viewpoint was that the Government should ask the Church’s opinion, but then make decisions independently. Still another view was that the Government was compelled to engage with all stakeholders, including the Church, though they did not rule out that things could be vice versa and that the Church could also further their interests with the help from the Government.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

*“The Government may not be able to influence some people, so it should govern through Church.”<sup>132</sup>*

However, some Muslim respondents regretted that Muslim youth is being converted to Christianity and losing the religion of their ancestors. They suspect that this is done for security considerations (against radicalization).

Secular sentiment was also measured among Muslims participating in the study, and a proportionate number was interviewed in Adjara. A clear majority (75.9%) of Muslim respondents supported the statement: **“The Administration of Muslims of All Georgia should never intervene in political decision-making”**. As for the alternative statement: **“In the political decision-making process, the politicians of the Adjara Autonomous Republic should consider the position of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia”**, was supported by 17.1%.

A focus group conducted with Muslim men demonstrated that, once again, secular sentiments were largely underpinned by the religious factor.

*“Georgian Islam in Adjara is the spiritual condition of the human being, rather than a political instrument. A religious leader is a spiritual leader and has no authority in other issues. In a Muslim’s life, Islam only takes one hour in 24 hours. The remaining 23 hours he is only a layman, a citizen without religion. Now the Muftiate<sup>133</sup> is being strengthened and made similar to the Patriarchate in an improper way. However, Muslims take no interest in the Muftiate’s opinions or decisions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Muftiate made a belated statement on March 17 that the mosques would not be closed. However, on March 19, at the insistence of the congregation, the decision was reversed.”<sup>134</sup>*

Respondents think that the Muftiate was not as religious as it was political, and therefore will not be able to influence Muslims’ attitudes and the Georgian Government uses it as a political instrument.

*“The state is strong and in the long run will make the best of and win the position. However, the Muslim community will not follow it at this stage.”<sup>135</sup>*

132 Ibid.

133 This refers to the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia.

134 Adjara, a Muslim man.

135 Ibid.

There was a high level of trust towards the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia by the Muslim respondents. However, in the focus groups the inconsistency of attitudes was explained by the fact that trust towards both the Administration of Muslims and towards separate spiritual leaders was strong, but their influence was limited to religious issues only.<sup>136</sup>

### **Findings:**

- ➡ Adjara is the most secular of the three regions, and Muslims are more inclined to secularism than Christians. Muslim secular sentiment is the same for the Church and the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Foreign Priorities and Support for Membership in International Institutions



#### Main friend of Georgia

Respondents named the following countries as “main friends” of Georgia.

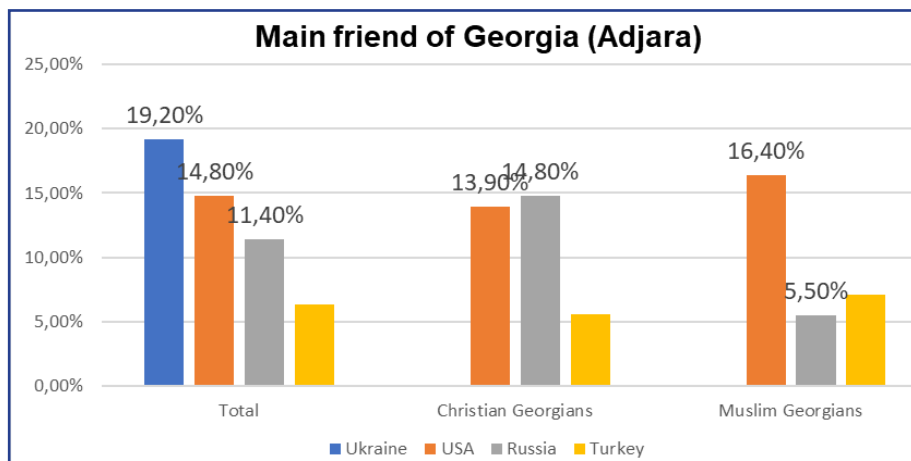
First of all, in Adjara **Ukraine** was perceived as Georgia’s main friend by 19.2% of those interviewed; the second highest result was the **USA**, at 14.8%. **Russia** was also chosen as a friend of Georgia in Adjara (11.4%), which distinguishes the region from Tbilisi and Samegrelo, where the percentage of those who named Russia as a friend was much lower (Tbilisi – 2.1%, Samegrelo – 5.1%).

Focus groups revealed that designating Russia as a friend was related to historical happenings, and the trauma that resulted from the period that the region was part of the Ottoman Empire. Thus Russia was perceived as an actor and protector of Georgian national interests.

**Turkey** was also designated as a friendly country by 6.3% of respondents in Adjara, distinguishing the region from the two others, where Turkey was named as a main friend by only 0.3% in Tbilisi and 2% in Samegrelo.

Data analysis shows that Russia was seen as a friendly country by more Christians (14.8%) than Muslims (5.5%). However, the USA was chosen by more Muslim respondents (16.4%) than Christians (13.9%) in Adjara. The choice of Turkey as a friendly country was more frequently expressed by Muslims (7.1%) than Christians (5.6%) (**Figure 32**).

**Figure 32.**



The USA had more supporters among Christians who have a priest (17.3%) than those who have no priest (12.8%). Russia has an equal number of supporters among Christians with or without a priest (13.8% of those who have and 13.6% of those who do not have a priest). Turkey was more frequently named by Christians without a priest (7.2%), than those with a priest (5.1%).

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Muslim Georgians have similar opinions about the USA, which was more frequently named as main friend of Georgia by more respondents who have an imam (19.4%) than by those who did not (15.1%). However, in the cases of Russia and Turkey there was a different dynamic. Russia has many more supporters among Muslims who did not have an imam (9.8%) than those who did (1.7%). Turkey as a main friend was perceived by almost the same number of those who did have an imam (8%) as those who did not (6.9%).

A significant number of Adjara respondents, 32.8%, were undecided about which countries were Georgia's main friend. Since this was an open question, other responses were recorded such as "NATO" (7.1%).

### **Findings:**

- Ukraine is chosen as Georgia's main friend by Adjara respondents, with others listed, in order, as the USA, Russia and Turkey.
- Compared to other regions, Russia and Turkey are most frequently named as main friends of Georgia by respondents in Adjara.
- Christians chose Russia and then the USA and Turkey as Georgia's main friend.

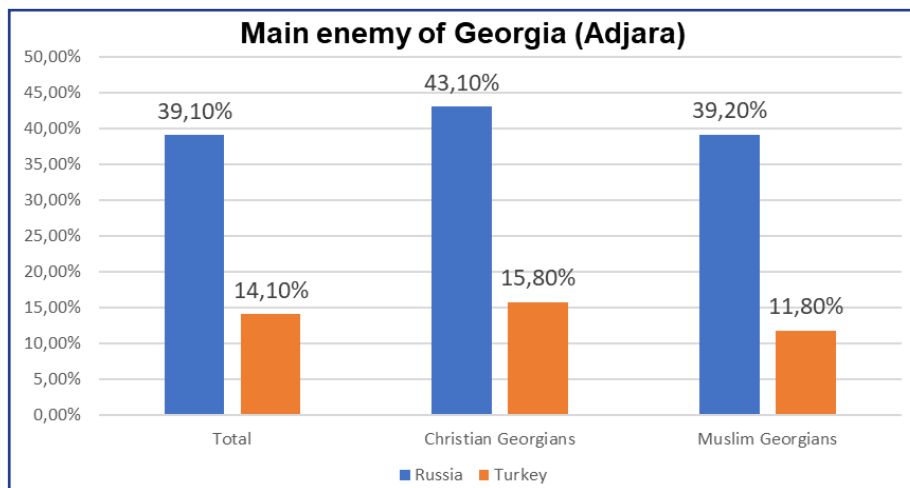
- Muslims name Georgia's main friends in the following order: America, Turkey and Russia.
- Russia as Georgia's main friend has more supporters among Christians (both with or without a priest), while the USA and Turkey has more supporters among Muslims.
- Russia as Georgia's main friend have many more supporters among Muslims without an imam.
- Religiousness correlates to being pro-American. Christians who have a priest and Muslims who have an imam are more pro-American than others.
- One-third of those interviewed are undecided about naming countries as 'main friend'.

## Main enemy of Georgia

In contrast with the countries which were friendly to Georgia, the respondents from Adjara also named countries that they perceived as Georgia's main enemy.

**Russia** was perceived as the main enemy by all three regions. However, in Adjara the percentage of those who named Russia (39.1%) was significantly lower than in Samegrelo (49.6%) and especially than in Tbilisi (62.8%). In Adjara 14.1% named **Turkey**, at a much higher rate than in other regions (Tbilisi – 2.8%; Samegrelo – 2.4%). As this was an open question, other countries named in Adjara as enemies of Georgia were **Armenia, Azerbaijan Iran** and others, which amounted to a total of 3.5%. Interestingly, 2.5% of those interviewed in Adjara believe that **“all countries”** were enemies of Georgia.

Figure 33.



Data showed that Russia was seen as the main enemy of Georgia among both Christians (43.1%) and Muslims (39.2%). In Adjara, Turkey was named as an enemy by more Christian respondents (15.8%) than by Muslims (11.8%) (**Figure 33**).

Russia was referred to as an enemy by many respondents, both those with or without spiritual leaders, although the numbers were higher for those who did have a priest or an imam. This viewpoint was shared by 48.9% of Christians with a priest and 36.8 % of Christians who did not. Russia was considered the main enemy by 41.8% of the respondents with an imam and 36.8% of those without.

Turkey was named as the main enemy by 18.7% of Christians with a priest and by 14.3% of those who do not. Muslims, on the contrary, named Turkey more if they did not have an imam (14.2%) than those who do (9.2%).

Interestingly, the **USA** was mentioned as an enemy by a few Christian respondents - those who had a priest were 1.6% and those who did not – 1.7%. None of the Muslims having an imam named the USA as an enemy; the percentage of those who did not have an imam was 0.8%.

### **Findings:**

- In Adjara, Russia is named as the main enemy of Georgia, though the percentage of those who name Russia lags far behind the other regions.
- Russia as the main enemy of Georgia holds a leading position both among Christians and Muslims, though the perception of Russia as an enemy is relatively stronger among Christians.
- Russia is named as an enemy by large numbers of those with or without a religious leader. This opinion is clearer among those who have a priest/imam.
- Compared with the other regions of Georgia, Turkey is named as a main enemy by most respondents. This attitude is stronger among Christians than among Muslims.
- The perception of Turkey as an enemy is stronger among Christians having a priest than among Muslims who do not have an imam, which could be indicative of the role of spiritual leaders in Adjara. This assumption is reinforced by the fact that while among the Christians and Muslims not having a priest/imam the perception of Turkey as an enemy is identical, the attitude is dramatically different among those who have a priest/imam: compared with the Muslims who have an imam, twice as many Christians who have a priest consider Turkey

an enemy.

- Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran and other countries are named as enemies in Adjara, though to a limited extent.
- The USA is named as an enemy by an insignificant group of Christian respondents, identical for those who have a priest and those who do not.
- None of the Muslims who have an imam name the USA as an enemy; the percentage of those who do not have an imam is minimal.
- In the opinion of a small segment of the interviewed, “all countries” are enemies of Georgia.
- Compared with Muslims, the number of Christians who name Russia both as main friend and main enemy is higher.

## The most powerful and attractive country

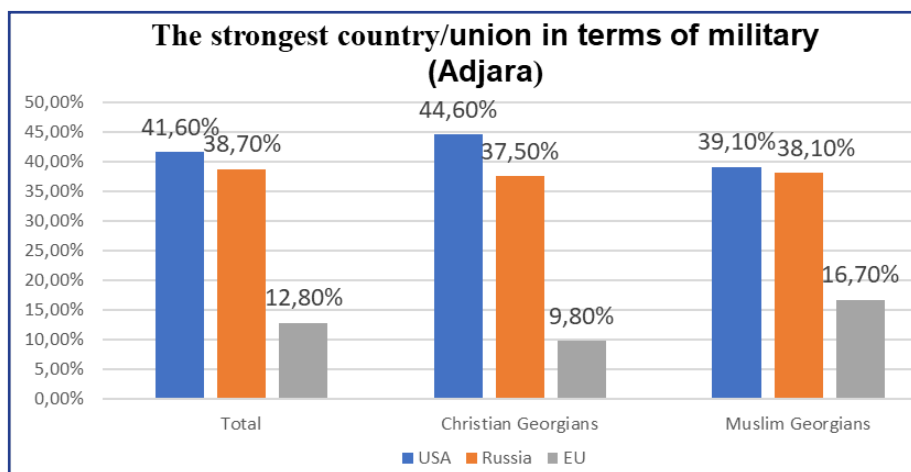
This section comprises the views of the respondents in Adjara on the economic and military strength of various countries/unions of countries as well as on their attractiveness for educational purposes.

In the Adjara region, like in the other three regions, the **USA** was named as **the strongest in economic** terms (47.6%). To this effect, the **European Union** (26.3%) also had a high rate (26.3%). **Russia** (11.8%) and **China** (9.7%) also received considerable results in Adjara.

In terms of **military strength**, it was still the **USA** that led with 41.6%. The second position in the list of militarily strong countries was **Russia** (38.7%). Russia's percentage was almost as high as the US's, while in the other two regions Russia was named by much fewer respondents - 22.2% in Tbilisi and 27.2% in Samegrelo.

The attitudes of Christians and Muslims, in terms of perception of military strengths of the US and Russia were different. The USA was named by 44.6% of Christians and 39.1% of Muslims, while Russia scored 37.5% among Christians and 38.1% among Muslims (**Figure 34**). Attitudes differ between respondents who were with or without a religious leader. Christian respondents perceived the USA as stronger if they did not have a priest (48.3%) more frequently than those who did (37.7%). Among Muslims, attitudes were identical for both cases: 39.3% of those who have an imam and 39.4% of those who did not named the USA as militarily strong.

**Figure 34.**



For Christians, the perception of the military superiority of Russia was stronger among those who did not have a priest (40.3%), than those who did (32.5%). Similarly, among Muslims, 39.4% of the those who did not have an imam and 35.7% of those who do.

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The respondents of focus groups conducted in Adjara explained the almost equal assessment of the military strength of the US and Russia by a lack of information in the region. They also pointed out that there were biased attitudes towards Russia due to Adjara's close economic, touristic and kindred ties. The more positive attitude by Russians towards Adjarans, different from the attitude of Turks towards Adjarans, as well as the efficient Russian propaganda, plays an important role in Adjarans' assessment of Russia.

Respondents from Adjara also expressed their views on **where it would be best for young people to receive education**. Out of the three regions, most of those from Adjara approve that youth should receive their education **abroad**, a view shared by 38% (32% in Tbilisi, 24.5% in Samegrelo), while receiving an education **both in Georgia and abroad** was supported by 35.7% in Adjara.

The **USA** (36.3%), **Germany** (22.2%) and **England** (11%) were listed most desirable for receiving a good education, which were the same countries listed in the other regions.

## Findings:

- In Adjara the USA is considered as the strongest country from economic and military standpoints.
- The European Union is perceived as second in terms of economic strength, while Russia and China are also named.
- From a military standpoint, Russia is considered the second strongest, very close to the US and exceeding the ratings for other regions.
- Although perceptions by Christians and Muslims are alike (the US and Russia are named in terms of military strength in both groups), their attitudes towards each country is different: Muslims assess the USA and Russia almost identically, but Christians tend to tilt towards the military strength of the USA.
- Both the USA and Russia are named as strongest from a military standpoint by Christians who do not have a priest, while among Muslims the attitude towards the USA is identical for those with or without a religious leader. The attitude towards Russia is somewhat higher among those who do not have an imam.
- Most Adjaran respondents support the idea of young people studying abroad, while those who support studies both in Georgia and abroad is almost as high.
- The USA and then Germany and England (in that order) are named as countries that are most desirable for receiving an education.

## Attractiveness of markets

Respondents from Adjara selected countries where they believed exporting Georgian products was most realistic – countries of the European Union, Russia or Turkey.

In Adjara 40.1% believe the **Russian** market is presently the most realistic for Georgian products, while the two other regions were not as convinced about this market (Tbilisi – 21.7%, Samegrelo – 28.5%). The **EU** market was selected the least by respondents in Adjara – 28.9% (45.3% in Tbilisi and 32.3% in Samegrelo). A very small group (7.7%) - nevertheless, the largest compared with the other regions (Tbilisi – 2.6%, Samegrelo – 2.4%) - think the **Turkish** market is more realistic for Georgian products.

For 40.4% of Christians, the Russian market seems most realistic for Georgian products, an opinion shared by 39.5% of Muslims. On the other hand, 25.4% of Christians and 25.3% of Muslims name the market of the European Union as the most realistic for the Georgian products.

## **Findings:**

- The respondents from Adjara (including from a religious standpoint) first favor the Russian market, then the European and finally the Turkish market.
- Compared with the other regions, Adjaran respondents are distinguished by their positive attitude towards exporting goods from Georgia to the Russian and the Turkish markets, and consider the European market less realistic.

## **EU membership**

Among the three regions studied, Adjara had the largest percentage of those supporting, and the lowest of those opposing, Georgia's membership in the EU. Joining the EU was supported by 84.1% of those interviewed in Adjara (Tbilisi – 77.2%, Samegrelo – 77.5%), whereas only 8.8% were against (12.2% in Tbilisi and 12.6% in Samegrelo).

The vast majority of Christians (83.4%) supported Georgia's joining the EU, and among Muslims an even larger majority (90.2%) approved. Interestingly, in Adjara the idea of joining the EU was favored by a clear majority among both those who have and did not have a spiritual leader, as 81.4% of Christians who have a priest and 84.8% of those who did not approve of joining the EU, and 92.8% of Muslims who have an imam and 87.8% of those who did not.

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Opponents to joining the EU among Christians who have a priest was relatively larger (13.3%) than for those who did not have a priest (8.5%). On the other hand, an opposing trend was found for Muslims with comparatively more opponents among those who did not have an imam (6.1%) than those who did (0.9%).

## **Findings:**

- Georgia's membership in the EU is supported by a vast majority of Adjaran respondents. This trend is apparent in terms of religion as well, with a slightly greater support among Muslims.
- Christians who have no priest support joining the EU more than those who do, whereas among Muslims those who have an imam support joining the EU more than those who do not.
- The number of opponents for joining the EU is small, though relatively bigger among Christians with a priest, while among Muslims the

opposite is true. The slightly negative role of priests and a somewhat positive role of imams is evident to the researchers.

## Membership in the Eurasian Economic Union

In comparison to the EU, the number of Adjara respondents who support Georgia's joining the Eurasian Economic Union was much lower. However, in Tbilisi and Samegrelo it was even lower. In Adjara the Eurasian Union support rate was 29.3% (18.4% in Tbilisi and 13% in Samegrelo) with the lowest number of opponents (52.3%). Opponents in Tbilisi number 65.1% and 66.6% in Samegrelo. The tendency was similar for Christians and Muslims: 29.8% of Christians and 27.3% of Muslims support joining the Eurasian Union, whereas 55.4% of Christians and 50% of Muslims were against it.

The negative attitude in Adjara towards joining the Eurasian Union was almost equally split between those who have a priest/imam (53%) and those who do not (54.2%), whilst 28.9% of Christians who have a priest and 30.3% of those who do not support joining the Eurasian Union. However Muslims have relatively more supporters for joining the Eurasian Union among the respondents who have an imam (28.3%) than among those who did not (25.3%).

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Opponents of joining the Eurasian Union include a relatively larger number of Christians, with more among the respondents who did not have a priest (56.4%) than among those who did (53.5%). For Muslims the trend was different, and as with joining the EU, relatively more opponents were recorded among those who have an imam (28.3%) than among those who did not (25.3%).

### Findings:

- The number of Adjara respondents supporting Georgia's joining the Eurasian Union is clearly lower than those who would join (although it's the biggest percentage compared to the other regions). There is also the lowest number for joining this organization.
- Positive and negative attitudes towards joining the Eurasian Union are similar both among Christians and Muslims, yet support is minimally greater among Christian respondents without a priest and vice versa in the case of Muslims with an imam.
- Those opposing joining the Eurasian Union are also largely Christians who do not have a priest, whereas for Muslims, these are again found among those with an imam.

## Supporting both the EU and the Eurasian Union at the same time

Data show that 24.8% of Adjara respondents support Georgia joining both of the mutually exclusive associations – the European Union and the Eurasian Union at the same time. Again Adjara shows the highest percentage (14.2% in Tbilisi and 7.2% in Samegrelo) of the three regions studied. If the number of EU supporters was deducted from this rate, the firm supporters in Adjara were 59.2% instead of 84%.

In focus groups, we clarified why the region's respondents support one or the other association and what accounts for choosing two mutually exclusive choices among a significant group of respondents. Among the Christian segment, support for Russia, and therefore, the Eurasian Union, was due to a large number of mixed, Georgian-Russian families in Batumi as well as to deep-rooted economic links since the Soviet period (for instance, the export of citrus fruits). Discussions demonstrated that respondents were polarized in the region, and the matter of siding or not siding with one or another foreign policy vector depended on which political power was supported by the population. Another issue was raised about the recent perceptions of the futility of full integration with the West, which made many support Russia.

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The support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic direction among the region's Muslims is their rational choice, while the support for Russia is resulting from the strong propaganda.

*“NATO and the European Union are the rational choices, while the choice of the Eurasian Union is due to propaganda.”<sup>137</sup>*

The results of the focus group show that support for the Russian vector by Muslims was also linked to their perception that they were champions and defenders of “Georgian national interests”. Some respondents believe this was caused by a strong ethno-confessional, nationalistic narrative inherited from the 1980s, based on a security concept targeting Muslims as an “unreliable” segment of society. This helps explain why Muslims were constantly trying to prove loyalty towards the state and, therefore, support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations. However, a significant number also support the Kremlin's vector, since ethno-confessional nationalism in the context of foreign policy was based on the same religion, shared with Russia.

*“A major problem regarding the Adjara Muslims is the fact that in the process of the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as in*

*the aftermath period and even nowadays the Muslim community is treated in a prism of security rather than in terms of human rights and civil integration.*"<sup>138</sup>

*"Over the course of his life and throughout the last several hundred years, an Adjaran has had to assert his national identity and his legitimacy within the Georgian state and to prove he is an advocate of its national interests."*<sup>139</sup>

The foreign, Euro-Atlantic interests of Georgia expressly coincide with the interests of Muslims, since it was within the Western political landscape that the latter see the opportunity for equality and high standards, as well as protection of their religious rights. This was a strong stimulus for support of the Euro-Atlantic vector.

*"Muslims see themselves integrated within the political landscape of the West, where all humans have the opportunity for equality and development in democracy. On the other hand, they do not want to be isolated from the common Georgian national narrative."*<sup>140</sup>

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The pro-Russian stance of a certain group of Adjarans was also explained by deep-rooted links maintained since the Soviet period, manifesting itself in the continuing substantial presence of secret services in the region, strengthened by intensive Russian propaganda and the language factor, but also by the activities of ultra-conservative powers that have recently gained strength. This nationalistic narrative feeds the ambivalence among religious minorities.

### **Findings:**

- ➡ Almost one-fourth of those surveyed support joining both the EU and the Eurasian Union at the same time.

### **Only membership in NATO**

Most respondents in Adjara (54.6%) share the view that **only joining NATO will help Georgia in ensuring security**. However, results of polls show that a significant number of Adjarans (35.9%) view the above issue with caution and even skepticism, and did not approve of it.

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138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

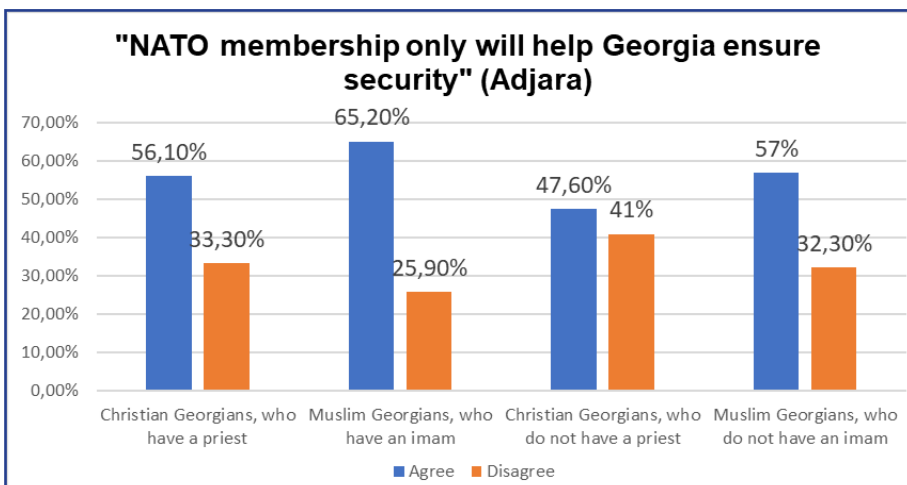
In spite of this, the participants of the focus groups in Adjara explicitly named NATO as a helper of Georgia in need.

More than half of Christians, or 56.4% (with 27.9% of them agreeing fully), adhere to the view that Georgia's integration into NATO would ensure the country's security. This view was shared by 67.8% of Muslims, with 45.9% fully agreeing.

It was interesting to view the results in terms of having and not having a religious leader. The majority of Christians with a priest agree that NATO was a positive actor for Georgia's security (56.1%), while 47.6% of Christians who do not have a priest adhere to this. More Christian respondents without a priest also disagree (41%) than those with a priest (33.3%).

For Muslims the trend was similar: 65.2% of those who have an imam, and 57% of those who do not, agree that the role of NATO was positive. Among those who disagree, more who did not have an imam agree (32.3%), than those who did (25.9%) (**Figure 35**).

**Figure 35.**



### **Findings:**

- Most Adjarans consider that only joining NATO will help Georgia provide its security. However, one-third view this issue with caution (skepticism) and express different views.
- Joining NATO as a warranty of the security of Georgia is approved

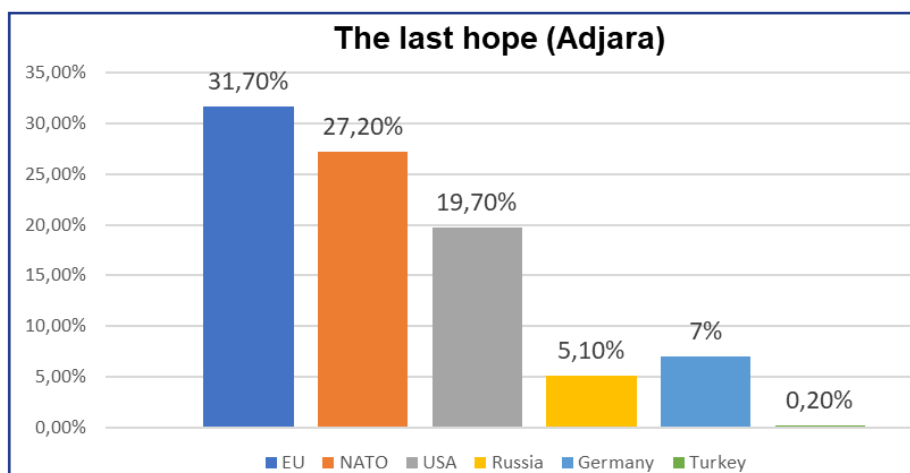
by both Christians and Muslims, with more supporters among Muslim respondents, and more opponents among Christians.

- Support for joining NATO is much stronger among those who have a priest/imam and stronger among Muslims who have an imam than among Christians who have a priest. It is also stronger among Muslims who do not have an imam than among Christians who do not have a priest. The number of opponents is, on the contrary, higher among Christians without a priest than among Muslims without an imam.

## The last hope

In case of a **great hardship/catastrophe (such as full-scale warfare, natural disaster, etc.) which could threaten the very existence of Georgia**, respondents place their maximum hopes on the **EU**, with the highest percentage recorded in Adjara – 31.7% (Tbilisi – 24.4%, Samegrelo – 20.4%). Respondents in Adjara also named **NATO** (27.2%) and the **USA** (19.7%). The latter has the least supporters in Adjara among the three target regions (27.3% in Tbilisi and 40% in Samegrelo). Interestingly, **Russia** was referred to as a helper in need by 5.1% of Adjarians, compared to 2% in Tbilisi and 0.7% in Samegrelo. **Germany** stood out in Adjara and was named by 7%. **Turkey** was named only by 0.2% of the respondents in Adjara and was not mentioned by the other regions (**Figure 36**).

**Figure 36.**



## **Findings:**

- In case of a great hardship, one-third of those surveyed in Adjara (the highest rate of the three regions) base their hopes on the EU first of all, then on NATO, the US (the fewest supporters among the three regions) and Germany.
- Russia and Turkey are named as potential helpers in times of need by a minor percentage in Adjara, which is still the largest compared to the other regions.

In contrast with other regions, there is more support for the two mutually exclusive organizations – the European Union and the Eurasian Union. In the Christian segment of Adjara this was probably due to the close economic and kindred relations with Russia, the desire of integration with the West, and, to a certain extent, the frustrated hopes of full integration with the West. For Muslims, their support of Georgia's course towards Euro-Atlantic integration was their rational choice, while the support of the Russian vector was the result of strong propaganda.

A different role for priests/imams appeared, showing that amid the positive attitude of the absolute majority of Christians towards joining the European Union, the support was relatively stronger among respondents without a priest, while the number of opponents for joining was also higher among the Christians with a priest. Thus, the influence of a priest was slightly negative. A counter-tendency was noted in the case of NATO. Higher support was shown by Christians with a priest, while those without disapproved. In this case, we could assume that a priest has a positive role.

The picture in the case of the Eurasian Union differed significantly, where relatively more supporters and opponents to joining it were respondents without a priest. Most Christians (both with and without priests) were against joining the Eurasian Union.

In the case of Muslims, whose absolute majority also showed support for Georgia joining the European Union and NATO, the positive influence of imams was manifested. Both organizations were supported more by those with an imam, while opposition came more from those who did not have one. In other words, it could be said that imams influence the Muslim community to view these organizations positively.

The picture differs for the Eurasian Union since both positive and negative attitudes were more or less equal among the respondents with and without an imam. The role of imam does not appear to be an influence.

For Adjara respondents, the European Union and NATO were not only the most desirable organizations for Georgia in terms of membership, but were potentially the most reliable in terms of helping when in need. Adjara residents rest their hopes on Russia and Turkey least of all.

## What represents a threat to Georgian traditions?

This part of the survey assessed the opinions of the respondents in Adjara about which country threatens Georgian traditions the most.

Most respondents in Adjara (58.1%) disagree and approximately one-third (33.2%) agree with the view that the **USA** threatens Georgian traditions. The latter was the highest rate compared to other regions (Tbilisi – 32.2%, Samegrelo – 29.1%).

Data showed that more than 58% of the Christians and Muslims believe the US does not threaten Georgian traditions. However there was a higher perception of threat among the Christians of Adjara: 19.9% fully agree that the US threatens Georgian traditions, but only 11.2% of Muslims agree.

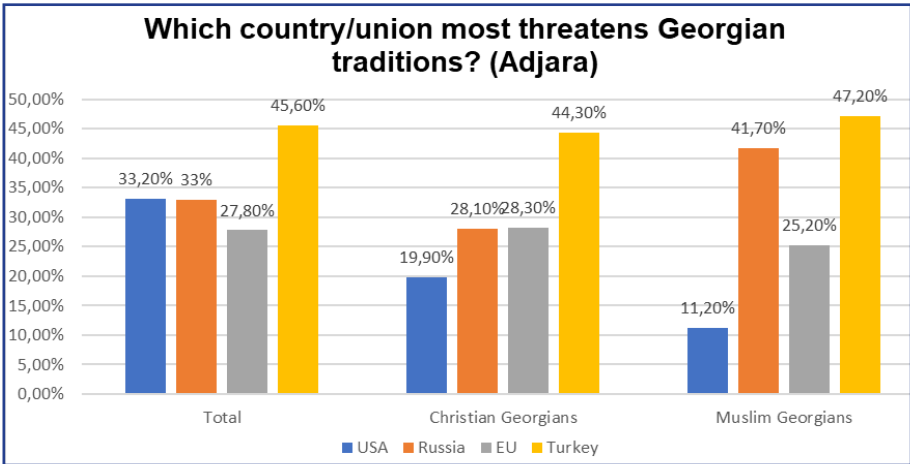
130

The data concerning those who have or do not have a priest/imam showed almost equal opinions between Christians and Muslims. Most respondents of both groups consider that the US does not threaten Georgian traditions. In particular, this view was shared by 57% of Christians who have a priest and 60.7% of those who do not, also by 59.8% of Muslims who have an imam and 56% of those who do not. Percentages of respondents who confirmed the existence of this threat from the US, were similar for both Christians with or without a priest and Muslims with or without an imam: 35.1% of Christians who have a priest and 32.2% of those who do not, as well as 31.3% of Muslims who have an imam and 31% of those who do not felt a threat.

The rates of perceived threats to Georgian traditions on the part of **Russia** were similar to those for the US: 33% of Adjara residents think Russia poses a threat, while 58.2% did not agree, which was the lowest rate in the three regions.

Followers of Islam in Adjara view Russia as a threat to traditions more than Christians do: 41.7% of Muslims believe Russia threatens Georgian traditions, while only 28.1% of Christians were of the same opinion. Conversely, 45.8% of Muslims and 65.1% of Christians consider that Russia does not constitute a threat to the Georgian traditions (**Figure 37**).

Figure 37.



For Christian respondents with a priest, 37.2% perceive a threat to traditions from Russia, with 24.6% of those who did not have a priest who agree with this. The Russian threat was less denied by Christians who have a priest (59.3%) than those who did not have one (69.2%).

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Muslims also perceived the threat more frequently when they have an imam (50.9%) than by those who did not (31%). The threat from Russia was less denied by those with an imam (39.3%) than by those without an imam (54%).

The **EU** was viewed as an organization posing a threat to the Georgian traditions by a little more than one-fourth (27.8%) of respondents. The majority (62.4%) did not perceive such a threat.

Both Christian (62.5%) and Muslim (63.1%) respondents equally deny the existence of threats coming from the European Union. They almost equally perceive such threats: 28.3% of Christians 25.2%.

In terms of Adjarans who have a priest/imam and those who do not perceptions were also identical: the existence of threat was mostly and almost equally denied by the respondents with a priest/imam and those without a priest/imam. Specifically, 27.4% of Christians with a priest and 28.9% without one confirm the threat. At the same time, 65.5% of the respondents who have a priest and 60.7% of those who do not have did not admit the existence of such a threat.

The data among Muslim Georgians were similarly distributed: the existence of threat was believed by 25.9% of those who have an imam and 23.5% of those who did not, while it was denied by 63.4% of those who have an imam and 64.4% who do not.

The viewpoints of respondents in Adjara on **Turkey** were equally divided – 45.6% admit the existence of a threat from Turkey, while 45.7% deny it, which was two times more than those who fully agreed that Turkey poses a threat (28.4%).

Results according to religion were also almost equally distributed: 44.3% of Christians and 47.2% of Muslims admitted Turkey was a threat, while 47.5% of Christians and 43.5% of Muslims did not. The threat from Turkey was perceived more by the respondents who have a priest/imam than by those who do not. Compared to Christians (50%) the perception of a threat was slightly higher among Muslims (53.6%). Respondents who did not have a priest/imam tended to deny the Turkish threat (51.4% among Christians and 46.5% among Muslims). Among Christians with a priest, 42.1% deny it and among Muslims with an imam, 39.3% deny it.

### **Findings:**

- Most respondents in Adjara (including in terms of religion) deny that the USA, Russia and the EU threaten Georgian traditions.
- One-third consider that the USA and Russia does threaten Georgian traditions, whereas around one-fourth state that the EU does so. In the case of the US, the rate is highest, and in case of Russia, on the contrary, the lowest as compared to the rest two regions.
- Muslims in Adjara see the threat to traditions by Russia more, while Christians deny it more.
- In both Christian and Muslim groups, there is evidence that having a priest/imam increases the perception of a threat on traditions by Russia; its existence is confirmed more and denied less by the respondents who have a priest/imam.
- The existence of a threat on traditions from the EU is practically perceived and denied by Christians and Muslims alike, both with or without a priest/imam.
- An identical number of respondents confirm and deny this threat from Turkey. In comparison with the other two regions, twice as many in Adjara (more than one-fourth) strongly believe that Turkey poses a threat.
- The perception of threats to tradition from Turkey is slightly stronger among Muslims.

- ➡ The threat from Turkey is more vividly perceived by respondents with a priest/imam.

Threats on traditions from the USA and Russia were perceived in Adjara by an almost identical percentage as those who deny such threats. In Adjara the weakest perception of threat was from the EU, and the strongest from Turkey. The latter was related to demographic expansion and attempts to impose the Turkish language and culture, as well as a covert expansion by Turkey through imposing Turkish ideology by using religious education among youths.

In the case of the USA, the perception of threat to traditions was identical among Christians and Muslims (however, a majority deny its existence), while the threat from Russia and Turkey was more clearly seen by Muslims than by Christians. There was a significant difference of opinion in the case of Russia, whereas the difference between the two groups about Turkey was minimal. The role of spiritual leaders became evident regarding Russia and Turkey, since the respondents who have one tend to see threats originating from these countries more, and also tend to deny it less.

In the case of the US and the EU, there was no statistical significance for the impact of having a spiritual leader, as the respondents with or without one expressed almost identical views. We can assume that having an imam influences the attitudes of Muslims towards Russia and Turkey to a certain extent. The perception of threat coming from both countries was much stronger among respondents who have an imam, while the attitudes related to the US and the EU were almost identical among the respondents who have an imam and those who do not.

## CONCLUSIONS

Among the three targeted regions, Adjara presented a very different picture in several ways. Compared to Tbilisi and Samegrelo, Adjara had a more favorable attitude towards Russians and Russia, more religious tolerance and positive attitudes towards Muslim Georgians, a greater level of trust towards governmental and non-governmental institutions, more paternalistic and secular attitudes, as well as an inconsistent taste for foreign policy.

At the same time there were a number of issues towards which Adjara showed less sensitivity, for instance perceived threats to Orthodoxy, or in considering a person Georgian. They had a more lenient attitude towards the arrival of international tourists, the acceptance of certain social groups, acquiring Georgian citizenship, or the acquisition of real estate by foreigners.

Although the study distinguished Adjara from the other regions by the perceptions and attitudes on many different issues, it also revealed similarities and differences within the region as such, namely between the two main groups, Orthodox Christian Georgians and Muslim Georgians. This includes religious and cultural, domestic and foreign policy issues, which show some contradictions as well as controversial attitudes towards a number of aspects. In turn, this identifies a need for additional in-depth studies of respective fields.

The study also revealed that some specifics of the region create favorable grounds for radical political powers which could capitalize on what the local population perceives as sensitive issues by stimulating anti-liberal processes and attitudes, or ethno-religious nationalism. This could widen the gap in values and dissolve understanding between the Christians and Muslims, resulting in an expansion of populist politics. In other words, there is a “demand and supply spiral” of anti-liberal populist narrative.

Thus, not only was the situation important with the region, but a number of aspects were found within the other two target regions related to attitudes towards Muslim Georgians. For example, the intolerant and often openly Islamophobic statements recorded in Tbilisi and even more in Samegrelo, that implicated Muslim Georgians, were noteworthy. Although there was no single vision on what “being a Georgian” is, it was religion that acts as one of the key “filters” of identity for a significant segment of the population in the target regions. Therefore, although Muslim Georgians are perceived as a part of Georgian culture, religious differences prevent them from becoming an organic fragment of a “Georgian puzzle”.

The study also showed that in spite of the comparatively high level of religious tolerance and interfaith harmony at the daily level, there was a latent discomfort between the Muslim and the Christian communities in the region which, though small, has potential for escalation in the presence of radicalization of the political discourse and destructive impulses in the religious sphere.

The perception by Muslim Georgians of an Orthodox “proselytism policy” was plain to see, and makes them feel closer to the security of the State than part of an integration policy or processes. The “cautious” attitude towards Muslim Georgians was aggravated by suspicions within the Christian population regarding the activity of religious schools (madrasas) which they consider as a political instrument of Turkey.

The increased anti-Turkish sentiment in Adjara is also worth mentioning, which is tied to sensitive issues for the local population. These include socio-economic, religious and other issues. Both Orthodox Christians and Muslims were skeptical about Turkey’s attitude to Georgia. The Muslim population of Adjara were perceived as less positively inclined towards Turkey. In focus groups, this fact was mostly related to the increase of the number of Turks in Adjara and the emergence of their compact settlements and their economic activity, which leads to the perception of discriminatory attitudes of Turkish investors towards locals employed in Turkish private companies. The study also revealed a suspicion in the region that Turkish national politics could be behind this. This was based partially on the perception that Turkey was motivated by “imperialistic” intentions and could have territorial claims in the future. Such attitudes were less frequent nor apparent when it concerns investors of other nationalities, including Russian investors.

Nativistic attitudes were also relevant, which were not only ethnocentric, but even ethnoreligious. These become apparent with the arrival of foreigners to Georgia, especially Turks, for long periods, with the issues of real estate acquisition and citizenship.

Preferences in domestic and foreign policy include the fact that in spite of general anti-establishment attitudes, Adjara stands out among the target regions by the highest level of trust towards governmental institutions (there was also the highest level of trust towards non-governmental institutions). Loyal attitudes towards central governmental institutions as well as paternalistic attitudes were more distinct among the Muslim segment of population. A pattern similar to other regions was visible concerning the form of governance, which showed that democratic governance was most desirable, while a disposition towards authoritarianism was weak. The region was also characterized by a

clear adherence to secularism, which was more clearly defined among Muslim Georgians, both concerning the Orthodox Church and the Administration of All Muslims.

As for foreign policy priorities, in spite of clearly expressed support for the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Georgia, in comparison with the other regions of Georgia Adjara appeared to be most favorable towards Russia and to joining the Eurasian Union (although to a lesser degree than for the European Union). Pro-Russian sentiment was stronger among Christians who see Russia more than the USA as 'main friend' of Georgia (although they also name it as the main enemy), and they overestimate its military power which they actually equate with the USA. The attitude of both religious groups towards the export of Georgian products to Russia was the same. Adjara considers this more realistic than entering the EU market, which differentiates Adjara from Samegrelo and Tbilisi.

Of particular interest was the Adjara adherence to joining two mutually exclusive associations – the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union. This significantly differentiates Adjara from the other regions. This "mixed" attitude within the focus groups revealed differences between Christian and Muslim Georgians. Pro-Russian sentiment in the region among both Christian and Muslim population was nurtured by Russian propaganda and the maintained economic and personal links with Russia. In comparison with Christians, a stronger support of the EU and Western institutions by Muslims could be due to the desire to emphasize the loyalty towards state policy, and the perception that the protection of human rights, including religious rights, is more feasible through integration with the western political landscape.

Overall, the study has shown that in spite of many similarities between the three target regions, the conservative, anti-liberal, populist, anti-establishment and anti-immigrant attitudes in Adjara have a somewhat different flavor, which was largely due to the region's demography, geography and historical legacy.

